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MUCH ADO ABOUT PETER

BY JEAN WEBSTER

" . . . PLUNGED INTO A RECKLESS FLIRTATION WITH MARY, THE CHAMBERMAID"

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BY

JEAN WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF
DADDY LONG-LEGS,
DEAR ENEMY, ETC.

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GERVIE ZAME, GERVIE DOOR

Much Ado About Peter

I

GERVIE ZAME, GERVIE DOOR

PETER and Billy, the two upper grooms at Willowbrook, were polishing the sides of the tall mail phaeton with chamois-skin rubbers and whistling, each a different tune, as they worked. So intent were they upon this musical controversy that they were not aware of Mrs. Carter's approach until her shadow darkened the carriage-house doorway. She gathered up her skirts in both hands and gingerly stepped inside. Peter had been swashing water about with a liberal hand, and the carriage-house floor was damp.

"Where is Joe?" she inquired.

"He 's out in the runway, ma'am, jumpin'

Blue Gipsy. Shall I call him, ma'am?" Billy answered, as the question appeared to be addressed to him.

"No matter," said Mrs. Carter, "one of you will do as well."

She advanced into the room, walking as nearly as possible on her heels. It was something of a feat; Mrs. Carter was not so light as she had been twenty-five years before. Peter followed her movements with a shade of speculative wonder in his eye; should she slip it would be an undignified exhibition. There was even a shade of hope beneath his respectful gaze.

"Why do you use so much water, Peter? Is it necessary to get the floor so wet?"

"It runs off, ma'am."

"It is very unpleasant to walk in."

Peter winked at Billy with his off eye, and stood at attention until she should have finished her examination of the newly washed phæton.

"The cushions are dripping wet," she observed.

"I washed 'em on purpose, ma'am. They was spattered thick with mud."

"There is danger of spoiling the leather if you put on too much water."

She turned to an inspection of the rest of the room, sniffing dubiously in the corner where the harness greasing was carried on, and lifting her skirts a trifle higher.

"It 's disgustingly dirty," she commented, "but I suppose you can't help it."

"Axle grease *is* sort o' black," Peter agreed graciously.

"Well," she resumed, returning to her errand with an appearance of reluctance, "I want you, William — or Peter either, it does n't matter which — to drive into the village this evening to meet the eight-fifteen train from the city. I am expecting a new maid. Take Trixy and the buckboard and bring her trunk out with you. Eight-fifteen, remember," she

added as she turned toward the doorway. "Be sure to be on time, for she won't know what to do."

"Yes, ma'am," said Peter and Billy in chorus.

They watched in silence her gradual retreat to the house. She stopped once or twice to examine critically a clipped shrub or a freshly spaded flower-bed, but she finally passed out of hearing. Billy uttered an eloquent grunt; while Peter hitched up his trousers in both hands and commenced a tour of the room on his heels.

"William," he squeaked in a high falsetto, "you 've spilt a great deal more water than is necessary on this here floor. You 'd ought to be more careful; it will warp the boards."

"Yes, ma'am," said Billy with a grin.

"An' goodness me! What is this horrid stuff in this box?" He sniffed daintily at the harness grease. "How many times must I

tell you, William, that I don't want anything like that on *my* harnesses? I want them washed in nice, clean soap an' water, with a little dash of *ee-oo-dee cologne*."

Billy applauded with appreciation.

"An' now, Peter," Peter resumed, addressing an imaginary self, "I am expectin' a new maid to-night — a pretty little French maid just like Annette. I am sure that she will like you better than any o' the other men, so I wish you to meet her at the eight-fifteen train. Be sure to be on time, for the poor little thing won't know what to do."

"No, you don't," interrupted Billy. "She told me to meet her."

"She did n't either," said Peter, quickly reassuming his proper person. "She said either of us, which ever was most convenient, an' I 've got to go into town anyway on an errand for Miss Ethel."

"She said me," maintained Billy, "an' I 'm goin' to."

"Aw, are you?" jeered Peter. "You 'll walk, then. I 'm takin' Trixy with me."

"Hey, Joe," called Billy, as the coachman's steps were heard approaching down the length of the stable, "Mrs. Carter come out here an' said I was to meet a new maid to-night, an' Pete says he 's goin' to. Just come an' tell him to mind 'is own business."

Joe appeared in the doorway, with a cap cocked on the side of his head, and a short bull-dog pipe in his mouth. It was strictly against the rules to smoke in the stables, but Joe had been autocrat so long that he made his own rules. He could trust himself — but woe to the groom who so much as scratched a safety-match within his domain.

"A new maid is it?" he inquired, as a grin of comprehension leisurely spread itself across his good-natured rubicund face. "I s'pose you 're thinking it 's pretty near your turn, hey, Billy?"

"I don't care nothin' about new maids,"

said Billy, sulkily, "but Mrs. Carter said me."

"You 're awful particular all of a sudden about obeying orders," said Joe. "I don't care which one of you fetches out the new maid," he added. "I s'pose if Pete wants to, he 's got the first say."

The Carter stables were ruled by a hierarchy with Joe at the head, the order of precedence being based upon a union of seniority and merit. Joe had ruled for twelve years. He had held the position so long that he had insidiously come to believe in the divine right of coachmen. Nothing short of a revolution could have dislodged him against his will; in a year or so, however, he was planning to abdicate in order to start a livery stable of his own. The money was even now waiting in the bank. Peter, who had commenced as stable-boy ten years before, was heir-presumptive to the place, and the shadow of his future greatness was already upon him. Billy, who

had served but a few meagre months at Willowbrook, did not realize that the highest honours are obtained only after a painful novitiate. He saw no reason why he should not be coachman another year just as much as Peter; in fact, he saw several reasons why he should be. He drove as well, he was better looking — he told himself — and he was infinitely larger. To Billy's simple understanding it was quantity, not quality, that makes the man. He resented Peter's assumption of superiority, and he intended, when opportunity should present itself, to take it out of Peter.

"I don't care about fetchin' out the new maid any more than Billy," Peter nonchalantly threw off after a prolonged pause, "only I 've got to take a note to the Holidays for Miss Ethel, and I 'd just as lief stop at the station; it won't be much out o' me way."

"All right," said Joe. "Suit yourself."

Peter smiled slightly as he fell to work again,

humming under his breath a song that was peculiarly aggravating to Billy. "*Je vous aime, je vous adore,*" it ran. Peter trilled it, "*Gervie zame, gervie door,*" but it answered the purpose quite as well as if it had been pronounced with the best Parisian accent.

The last maid — the one who had left four days before — had been French, and during her three weeks' reign at Willowbrook she had stirred to its foundations every unattached masculine heart on the premises. Even Simpkins, the elderly English butler, had unbent and smiled foolishly when she coquettishly chucked him under the chin in passing through the hall. Mary, the chambermaid, had been a witness to this tender passage, and poor Simpkins's dignity ever since had walked on shaky ground. But Annette's charms had conquered more than Simpkins. Tom, the gardener, had spent the entire three weeks of her stay in puttering about the shrubs that

grew in the vicinity of the house; while the stablemen had frankly prostrated themselves — with the exception of Joe, who was married and not open to Gallic allurements. It was evident from the first, however, that Peter and Billy were the favoured ones. For two weeks the race between them had been even, and then Peter had slowly, but perceptibly, pulled ahead.

He had returned one morning from an errand to the house with a new song upon his lips. It was in the French language. He sang it through several times with insistent and tender emphasis. Billy maintained a proud silence as long as curiosity would permit; finally he inquired gruffly:

"What 's that you 're givin' us?"

"It 's a song," said Peter, modestly. "Annette taught it to me," and he hummed it through again.

"What does it mean?"

Peter's rendering was free.

"It means," he said, "I don't love no one but you, me dear."

This episode was the beginning of strained relations between the two. There is no telling how far their differences would have gone, had the firebrand not been suddenly removed.

One morning Joe was kept waiting under the *porte-cochère* unusually long for Mrs. Carter to start on her daily progress to the village, but instead of Mrs. Carter, finally, his passenger was Annette — bound to the station with her belongings piled about her. Joe had a wife of his own, and it was none of his affair what happened to Annette, but he had observed the signs of the weather among his underlings, and he was interested on their account to know the wherefore of the business. Annette, however — for a French woman — was undemonstrative. All that Joe gathered in return for his sympathetic questions (they were sympathetic; Joe was human even if he was married) was a series of indignant

sniffs, and the assertion that she was going because she wanted to go. She would n't work any longer in a place like that; Mrs. Carter was an old cat, and Miss Ethel was a young one. She finished with some idiomatic French, the context of which Joe did not gather.

Billy received the news of the departure with unaffected delight, and Peter with philosophy. After all, Annette had only had three weeks in which to do her work, and three weeks was too short a space for even the most fetching of French maids to stamp a very deep impression upon Peter's roving fancy. Four days had passed and his wound was nearly healed. He was able to sit up and look about again by the time that Mrs. Carter ordered the meeting of the second maid. Ordinarily the grooms would not have been so eager to receive the assignment of an unallotted task, but the memory of Annette still rankled, and it was felt between them that the long drive from the

station was a golden opportunity for gaining a solid start in the newcomer's affections.

The stablemen did not eat with the house servants; Joe's wife furnished their meals in the coachman's cottage. That evening Peter scrambled through his supper in evident haste. He had an important engagement, he explained, with a meaning glance toward Billy. He did take time between mouthfuls, however, to remark on the fact that it was going to be a beautiful moonlight night, just a "foin" time for a drive.

An hour later, Billy having somewhat sulkily hitched Trixy to the buckboard under Joe's direction, Peter swaggered in with pink and white freshly shaven face, smelling of bay-rum and the barber's, with shining top-hat and boots, and spotless white breeches, looking as immaculate a groom as could be found within a hundred miles of New York. He jauntily took his seat, waved his whip toward Billy and Joe, and touched up Trixy with a grin of farewell.

Later in the evening the men were lounging in a clump of laurels at one side of the carriage-house, where a hammock and several battered veranda chairs had drifted out from the house for the use of the stable hands. Simpkins, who occasionally unbent sufficiently to join them, was with the party to-night, and he heard the story of Peter's latest perfidy. Simpkins could sympathize with Billy; his own sensibilities had been sadly lacerated in the matter of Annette. Joe leaned back and smoked comfortably, lending his voice occasionally to the extent of a grunt. The grooms' differences were nothing to him, but they served their purpose as amusement.

Presently the roll of wheels sounded on the gravel, and they all strained forward with alert interest. The driveway leading to the back door swerved broadly past the laurels, and — as Peter had remarked — it was a bright moonlight night. The cart came into view, bowling fast, Peter as stiff as a ramrod

staring straight ahead, while beside him sat a brawny Negro woman twice his size, with rolling black eyes and gleaming white teeth. An explosion sounded from the laurels, and Peter, who knew what it meant, cut Trixy viciously.

He dumped his passenger's box upon the back veranda with a thud, and drove on to the stables where he unhitched poor patient little Trixy in a most unsympathetic fashion. Billy strolled in while he was still engaged with her harness. Peter affected not to notice him. Billy commenced to hum, "*Je vous aime, je vous adore.*" He was no French scholar; he had not had Peter's advantages, but the tune alone was sufficiently suggestive.

"Aw, dry up," said Peter.

"Pleasant moonlight night," said Billy.

Peter threw the harness on to the hook with a vicious turn that landed the most of it on the floor, and stumped upstairs to his room over the carriage-house.

For the next few days Peter's life was rendered a burden. Billy and Joe and Simpkins and Tom, even good-natured Nora in the kitchen, never met him without covert allusions to the affair. The gardener at Jasper Place, next door, called over the hedge one morning to inquire if they did n't have a new maid at their house. On the third day after the arrival the matter reached its logical conclusion.

"Hey, Pete," Billy called up to him in the loft where he was pitching down hay for the horses. "Come down here quick; there 's some one wants to see you."

Peter clambered down wearing an expectant look, and was confronted by the three grinning faces of Billy, Tom, and David McKenna, the gardener from Jasper Place.

"It was Miss Johnsing," said Billy. "She was in a hurry an' said she could n't wait, but she 'd like to have you meet her on the back stoop. She 's got a new song she wants to teach you."

Peter took off his coat and looked Billy over for a soft spot on which to begin. Billy took off his coat and accepted the challenge, while David, who was a true Scotchman in his love of war, delightedly suggested that they withdraw to a more secluded spot. The four trooped in silence to a clump of willow trees in the lower pasture, Peter grimly marching ahead.

Billy was a huge, loose-jointed fellow who looked as if he could have picked up little Peter and slung him over his shoulder like a sack of flour. Peter was slight and wiry and quick. He had once intended to be a jockey, but in spite of an anxious avoidance of potatoes and other fattening food-stuffs, he had steadily grown away from it. When he finally reached one hundred and sixty-six pounds he relinquished his ambition forever. Those one hundred and sixty-six pounds were so beautifully distributed, however, that the casual observer would never have guessed

their presence, and many a weightier man had found to his sorrow that Peter did not belong to the class he looked.

The hostilities opened with Billy's good-natured remark: "I don't want to hurt you, Petey. I just want to teach you manners."

Ten minutes later Peter had taught him manners, and was striding across the fields to work off his surplus energy, while Billy, whose florid face had taken on a livelier tinge, was comforting a fast-swelling eye at the drinking trough.

It was the last that Peter heard of the maid, except for a mild lecture from Joe. "See here, Pete," he was greeted upon his return, "I 'm given to understand that you 've been fighting for your lady-love. I just want you to remember one thing, young man, and that is that I won't have no fighting about these premises in business hours. You 've laid up Billy for the day, and you can go and do his work."

Three weeks rolled over the head of "Miss

Johnsing," and then she, too, departed. It developed that a husband had returned from a vacation on "the island" and wished to settle down to family life again. A week passed at Willowbrook without a parlour-maid, and then one day, as Peter returned from the lower meadow where he had been trying to entice a reluctant colt into putting its head into the halter, he was hailed by Joe with:

"Say, Pete, Mrs. Carter sent out word that you 're to go to the station to-night and fetch out a new maid."

"Aw, go on," said Peter.

"That 's straight."

"If there 's a new maid comin' Billy can get her. I ain't interested in maids."

"Them 's orders," said Joe. "'Tell Peter,' she says, 'that he 's to drive in with the buck-board and meet the eight-fifteen train from the city. I 'm expectin' a new maid,' she says, but she neglected to mention what colour she was expectin' her to be."

Peter grunted by way of answer, and Joe chuckled audibly as he hitched up his trousers and rolled off toward his own house to tell his wife the joke. The subject was covertly alluded to at supper that night, with various speculations as to the colour, nationality, and possible size of the newcomer. Peter emphatically stated his intention of not going near the blame station. When the train hour approached, however, the stables were conspicuously empty, and there was nothing for him to do but swallow his assertion and meet the maid.

As he drove down the hill toward the station he saw that the eight-fifteen train was already in, but he noted the fact without emotion. He was not going to hurry himself for all the maids in creation; she could just wait until he got there. He drew up beside the platform and sat surveying the people with mild curiosity until such time as the maid chose to search him out. But his pulses suddenly

quickened as he heard a clear voice, with an adorable suggestion of brogue behind it, inquire of the station-master:

"Will you tell me, sor, how I 'll be gettin' to Mr. Jerome B. Carter's?"

"Here 's one of the Carter rigs now," said the man.

The girl turned quickly and faced Peter, and all his confused senses told him that she was pretty — prettier than Annette — pretty beyond all precedent. Her eyes were blue, and her hair was black and her colour was the colour that comes from a childhood spent out of doors in County Cork.

He hastily scrambled out of his seat and touched his hat. "Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am, are ye the new maid? Mrs. Carter sent me to fetch ye out. If ye 'll gi' me yer check, ma'am, I 'll get yer trunk."

The girl gave up her check silently, quite abashed by this very dressy young groom. She had served during the two years of her

American experience as "second girl" in a brown-stone house in a side street, and though she had often watched men of Peter's kind from a bench by the park driveway, she had never in her life come so near to one as this. While he was searching for her trunk, she hastily climbed into the cart and moved to the extreme end of the left side of the seat, lest the apparition should return and offer assistance. She sat up very stiffly, wondering meanwhile, with a beating heart, if he would talk or just stare straight ahead the way they did in the park.

Peter helped the baggage-man lift in her trunk, and as he did it he paused to take a good square look. "Gee, but Billy will want to kick himself!" was his delighted inward comment as he clambered up beside her and gathered the reins in his hands. They drove up the hill without speaking, but once Peter shot a sidewise glance at her at the same moment that she looked at him, and they both turned pink. This was embarrassing, but

reassuring. He was, then, nothing but a man in spite of his clothes, and with a man she knew how to deal.

A full moon was rising above the trees and the twilight was fading into dusk. As Billy had justly observed at the supper table, it was a fine night in which to get acquainted. The four miles between the station and Willowbrook suddenly dwindled into insignificance in Peter's sight, and at the top of the hill he turned Trixy's head in exactly the wrong direction.

"If ye have no objections," he observed, "we 'll drive the long way by the beach because the roads is better."

The new maid had no objections, or at least she did not voice any, and they rolled along between the fragrant hedgerows in silence. Peter was laboriously framing to himself an opening remark, and he found nothing ludicrous in the situation; but to the girl, whose Irish sense of humour was inordinately developed,

it appeared very funny to be riding alone beside a live, breathing groom, in top-hat and shining boots, who turned red when you looked at him.

She suddenly broke into a laugh — a low, clear, bubbling laugh that lodged itself in Peter's receptive heart. He looked around a moment with a slightly startled air, and then, as his eyes met hers, he too laughed. It instantly cleared the atmosphere. He pulled Trixy to a walk and faced her. His laborious introductory speech was forgotten; he went to the point with a sigh of relief.

"I guess we 're goin' to like each other — you an' me," he said softly.

The moon was shining and the hawthorn flowers were sweet. Annie's eyes looked back at him rather shyly, and her dimples trembled just below the surface. Peter hastily turned his eyes away lest he look too long.

"Me name 's Peter," he said, "Peter Malone. Tell me yours, so we 'll be feelin' acquainted."

"Annie O'Reilly."

"Annie O'Reilly," he repeated. "There 's the right swing to it. 'T is better than Annette."

"Annette?" inquired Annie.

She had perceived that he was a man; he now perceived that she was a woman, and that Annette's name might better not have been mentioned.

"Ah, Annette," he said carelessly "a parlour-maid we had a while ago; an' mighty glad we was to be rid of her," he added cannily.

"Why?" asked Annie.

"She was French; she had a temper."

"I 'm Irish; I have a temper — will ye be glad to be rid o' me?"

"Oh, an' I 'm Irish meself," laughed Peter, with a broader brogue than usual. "'T is not Irish tempers I 'm fearin'. Thim I c'n manage."

When they turned in at the gates of Willowbrook — some half an hour later than they

were due, owing to Peter's extemporaneous route by the beach — he slowed Trixy to a walk that he might point out to his companion the interesting features of her new home. As they passed the laurels they were deeply engaged in converse, and a heavy and respectful silence hung about the region.

"Good night, Mr. Malone," said Annie, as he deposited her trunk on the back veranda. "'T is obliged to ye I am for bringin' me out."

"Oh, drop the Mister Malone!" he grinned. "Peter's me name. Good night, Annie. I hope as ye 'll like it. It won't be my fault if ye don't."

He touched his hat, and swinging himself to the seat, drove whistling to the stables. He unhitched Trixy and gave her a handful of salt. "Here, old girl, what are ye tryin' to do?" ne asked as she rubbed her nose against his shoulder, and he started her toward her stall with a friendly whack on the back. As he was putting away her harness, Billy lounged

in, bent on no errand in particular. Peter threw him a careless nod, and breaking off his whistling in the middle of a bar, he fell to humming softly a familiar tune. "*Gervie zame, gervie door,*" was the song that he sang.

THE RUFFLED FROCK

II

THE RUFFLED FROCK

IT WAS the Fourth of July, and Annie was hurrying with her work in order to get out and celebrate. She had no particular form of celebration in view, but she had a strong feeling that holidays, particularly Fourths of July, ought to be celebrated; and she was revolving in her mind several possible projects, in all of which Peter figured largely. Aside from its being the Fourth of July, it was Thursday, and Thursday was Peter's afternoon off. She put away the last of the dishes with a gay little burst of song as she glanced through the window at the beckoning outside world. It was a bright sunshiny day with a refreshing breeze blowing from the sea. The blue waters of the bay, sparkling at the foot of the lower

meadow, were dotted over with white sail-boats.

"Do ye want anything more of me, Nora?" she asked.

"No, be off with you, child," said Nora, good-naturedly. "I 'll finish puttin' to rights meself," and she gathered up the dish-towels and carried them into the laundry.

Annie paused by the screen door leading on to the back veranda, and stood regarding the stables speculatively. She was wondering what would be the most diplomatic way of approaching Peter. Her speculations were suddenly interrupted by the appearance in the kitchen of Miss Ethel, with a very beruffled white muslin frock in her arms.

"Annie," she said, "you 'll have to wash this dress. I forgot to have Kate do it yesterday, and I want to wear it to-night. Have it ready by five o'clock and be careful about the lace."

She threw the frock across the back of a

chair, and ran on out of doors to join a laughing crowd of young people about the tennis-court. Annie stood in the middle of the floor and watched her with a fast-clouding brow.

"An' never so much as said please!" she muttered to herself. She walked over and picked up the frock. It was very elaborate with ruffles and tucks and lace insertion; its ironing meant a good two hours' work. Ironing muslin gowns on a Fourth of July was not Annie's business. She turned it about slowly and her eyes filled with tears — not of sorrow for the lost afternoon, but of anger at the injustice of demanding such work from her on such a day.

Presently Nora came in again. She paused in the doorway, her arms akimbo, and regarded Annie.

"What 's that you 've got?" she inquired.

Then the floodgates of Annie's wrath were opened and she poured out her tale.

"Don't you mind it, Annie darlin'," said Nora, trying to comfort her. "Miss Ethel did n't mean nothin'. She was in a hurry, likely, an' she did n't stop to think."

"Did n't think! Why can't she wear some other dress? She 's got a whole room just full o' dresses, an' she has to have that special one ironed at a minute's notice. An' Kate comin' three days in the week! It is n't my place to wash — that is n't what Mrs. Carter engaged me for — I would n't 'a' minded so much if she 'd asked it as a favour, but she just ordered me as if washin' was me work. On Fourth o' July, too, an' Mrs. Carter tellin' me I could have the afternoon off — an' all those ruffles — 'have it done by five o'clock,' she says, an' goes out to play."

Annie threw the dress in a fluffy pile in the middle of the floor.

"I shan't do it! I won't be ordered about that way by Miss Ethel or anybody else."

"I 'd do it for you meself, Annie, but I

could n't iron that waist no more 'n a kangaroo. But you just get to work on it; you iron beautiful and it won't take you long when you once begin."

"Won't take me long? It 'll take me the whole afternoon; it 'll take me forever. I shan't touch it!"

Annie's eyes wandered out of doors again. The sunshine seemed brighter, the songs of the birds louder, the glimpse of the bay more enticing. And, as she looked, Peter came sauntering out from the stables — Peter in his town clothes, freshly shaven, with a new red necktie and a flower in his buttonhole. He was coming toward the kitchen.

Annie's lips trembled and she kicked the dress spitefully.

Peter appeared in the doorway. He, too, had been revolving projects for the fitting celebration of the day, and he wished tentatively to broach them to Annie.

"What 's up?" he inquired, looking from Annie's flushed cheeks to Nora's troubled eyes.

Annie repeated the story, growing more and more aggrieved as she dwelt upon her wrongs. "An' never so much as said please," she finished.

"That 's nothin' — ye must n't mind it, Annie. Miss Ethel ain't used to sayin' please." Peter was gropingly endeavouring to soothe her. "I remember times when she was a little girl she 'd be so sassy, that, Lor', me fingers was itchin' to shake her! But I knowed she did n't mean nothin', so I just touches me hat an' swallows it. She 's used to orderin', Annie, an' ye must n't mind her."

"Well, I ain't used to takin' orders like that, an' what 's more, I won't! 'Have it done by five o'clock,' she says, an' it 's half past two, now. An' all them ruffles! I hate ruffles, an' I won't touch it after the way she talked. Not if she goes down on her knees to me, I won't."

"Aw, Annie," remonstrated Peter, "what 's the use in kickin' up a fuss? Miss Ethel's awful kind hearted when she thinks about it."

"Kind hearted!" Annie sniffed. "I guess she can afford to be kind hearted, havin' people wait on her from mornin' to night an' never doin' a thing she does n't want to do. I wish she had to iron once, an' she could just see how she likes it."

"She gave you a bran' new dress last week," reminded Nora.

"Yes, an' why? 'Cause when I was dustin' her room she happened to be tryin' it on an' it did n't fit, an' she threw it down on the floor an' said: 'I won't wear that thing! You can have it, Annie.' "

"The time you burned your hand with her chafing-dish she 'most cried when she saw how blistered it was, an' wrapped it up herself, an' brought you some stuff in a silver box to put on it."

For a moment Annie showed signs of relent-

ing, but as her glance fell upon the dress again, she hardened. "She tipped the alcohol over me herself an' she 'd ought to be sorry. I 'd be willin' to do her a favour, but I *won't* be ordered around. She just pokes it at me as if I was an ironing machine. An' this the Fourth o' July, an' Mrs. Carter tellin' me I could go out. She has enough dresses to last from now till she 's gray, an' I just won't touch it!"

"You won't touch what?" asked Mrs. Carter, appearing in the doorway. She glanced from the girl's angry face to the rumpled frock upon the floor. They told their own story. "What 's the meaning of this, Annie?" she asked sharply.

Annie looked sulky. She stared at the floor a moment without answering, while Peter's and Nora's eyes anxiously scanned Mrs. Carter's face. Finally she replied:

"You said I could go out this afternoon, ma'am, an' just as I was gettin' ready, Miss

Ethel came in an' said I was to wash that dress before five o'clock."

"I am sorry about your afternoon," said Mrs. Carter. "Miss Ethel did n't know about it, but you may go to-morrow afternoon instead."

"I was wantin' to go to-day," said Annie. "I 'm willin' enough to do me own work, ma'am, but it is n't me place to wash."

Mrs. Carter's mouth became a straight line.

"Annie, I never allow my servants to dictate as to what is their work and what is not. When I engage you, I expect you to do whatever you are asked. This is a very easy place; you are allowed to go out a great deal, and you have very little work to do. But when something extra comes up outside your regular work, I expect you to do it willingly and as a matter of course. Miss Ethel has been very kind to you; you can do her a favour in return."

"I would n't mind doin' it as a favour, but she just walks in an' orders it as if it was me regular place to wash."

"And I order it also," said Mrs. Carter. "You may wash that dress and have it done by five o'clock, or else you may pack your trunk and go." She turned with a firm tread and walked out of the room.

Annie looked after her with flashing eyes.

"She orders it too, does she? Well, I won't do it, an' I won't, an' I *won't!*" She dropped down in a chair at one end of the table and hid her head in her arms.

Peter cast an anxious glance at Nora; he did not know how to deal with Annie's case. Had she been an obstinate stable-boy, he would have taken her out behind the barn and thrashed reason into her with a leather strap. He awkwardly laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Aw, Annie, wash the dress; there 's a good girl. It won't take ye very long, an' then we 'll go down t' the beach to-night to see the fireworks. Miss Ethel did n't mean nothin'. What 's the use o' makin' trouble?"

"It 's no more my place to wash than it is

Simpkins's," she sobbed. "Why did n't she ask him to do it? I won't stay in a place like this where they order you around like a dog. I 'll pack me trunk, I will."

Nora and Peter regarded each other helplessly. They furtively sympathized with Annie, but they did not dare to do it openly, as sympathy only fanned the flames, and they both knew that Mrs. Carter, having pronounced her ultimatum, would stand by it. Annie must wash that dress before five o'clock, or Annie must go. At the thought of her going, Peter fetched a deep sigh, and two frowning lines appeared on his brow. She had been there only four weeks, but Willowbrook would never again be Willowbrook without her. Presently the silence was broken by the sound of generous footsteps flapping across the back veranda, and Ellen, the cook at Mr. Jasper's, appeared in the doorway.

"Good afternoon to ye, Nora, an' I wants to borrow a drop o' vanilla. I ardered it two

days ago, an' that fool of a grocer's b'y —— what 's the matter wit' Annie?" she asked, her good-natured laughing face taking on a look of concern as she gazed at the tableau before her.

Nora and Peter between them explained. Annie, meanwhile, paid no attention to the recital of her wrongs; only her heaving shoulders were eloquent. Ellen hearkened to the story with ready sympathy.

"Oh, it 's a shame, it is, an' on Fort' o' July! We all has our troubles in this world." She sighed heavily and winked at Peter and Nora while she pushed them toward the door. "Get out wit' ye, the two of yez, an' lave her to me," she whispered.

Ellen reached down and picked up the dress. " 'T is somethin' awful the things people will be puttin' on ye, if ye give 'em the chance. 'T is a shame to ask any human bein' to wash a dress like that wit' all them ruffles an' lace fixin's. I think it 's bad enough to have to

wash Mr. Harry's shirts, but if he took to havin' lace set in 'em, I 'd be leavin' pretty quick. An' ye not trained to laundry work either! I don't see how Miss Ethel had the nerve to ask it. She must be awful over-reachin'. She 'll be settin' ye to play the piano next for her to dance by."

Annie raised a tear-stained face.

"I could do it," she said sulkily. "I can wash as good as Kate; Miss Ethel said I could. It 's not the work I 'm mindin' if she 'd ask me decent. But she just throws it at me with never so much as please."

"I don't blame ye for leavin'; I would, too." Ellen suddenly had an inspiration, and she plumped down in a chair at the opposite end of the table. "I 'm goin' to leave meself!" she announced. "I won't be put upon either. An' what do ye think Mr. Jasper is after telephonin' out this afternoon? He 's bringin' company to dinner — three strange min I niver set eyes on before — an' he 's sint a

fish home by Patrick, a blue fish he 's after catchin'. It 's in the ice-box now an' we 're to have it for dinner, he says, an' I wit' me dinner all planned. I don't mind havin' soup, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert, but I *won't* have soup, *an' fish*, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert. If there was as many to do the work at our house as there is over here, I would n't say nothin', but wit' only me an' George — an' him not so much as touchin' a thing but the silver an' the glasses — it 's too much, it is. George 'ud see me buried under a mountain o' dishes before he 'd lift a finger to help."

Ellen paused with a pathetic snivel while she wiped her eyes on a corner of her apron. Annie raised her head and regarded her sympathetically.

"Soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert, an' three strange min into the bargain, an' all the dishes to wash, an' the fish not even cleaned. True it is that troubles niver come single; they 're married an' has children.

Ivery siparate scale o' that blue fish did I take off wit' me own hands, an' not a word o' thanks do I get. I slaves for those two min till me fingers is worn to the bone, an' not a sign do they give; but just let the meat be too done, or the bottles not cold, an' then I hears quick enough! 'T is the way wit' min; they 're an ungrateful set. Ye can work an' work till ye 're like to drop, an' they swallows it all an' niver blinks. It ud be different if there was a woman around. I 've often wished as Mr. Harry had a wife like Miss Ethel, so smilin' an' pretty 't is a pleasure to watch her. Oh, an' I would n't mind workin' a little extra now an' then for her — but five courses an' no one but me to do the dishes! It 's goin' I am. I 'll give notice to-night."

Ellen broke down and wept into her apron while Annie attempted some feeble consolation.

"I 've worked there thirteen years!" Ellen sobbed. "Since before Mrs. Jasper died, when

Mr. Harry was only a b'y. 'T is the only home I 've got, an' I don't want to leave."

"Then what makes you?" Annie asked.

"Because I won't be put upon — soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert is too much to ask of any human bein'. The dishes won't be done till ten o'clock, an' it 's Fort' o' Ju-l-y-y." Ellen's voice trailed into a wail. Her imagination was vivid; by this time she fully believed in her wrongs. They cried in unison a few minutes, Ellen murmuring brokenly: "Soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert, an' it 's all the home I 've got.

"You don't have company very often," said Annie consolingly.

"That we don't!" cried Ellen. "An' the house is so lonesome an' shut up 't is like a tomb to live in. If there was dancin' an' singin' an' laughin' the way there is over here I 'd be glad enough. Wit' Mr. Jasper an' Mr. Harry so quiet an' frownin' an never sayin' a word — Oh, if I had someone like Miss Ethel to do for

't is willin' enough I 'd be to iron her dresses. That night she had her party an' I come over to help, an' you an' Pete was dancin' in the kitchen to the music, an' after the guests was served we had a table set out on the back veranda — 't is then I was wishin' I lived in a place like this. An' Miss Ethel come out when we was eatin' an' asked was we tired an' said thank you for sittin' up so late, an' she was glad if we was havin' a good time, too."

Annie sighed, and her eyes wandered somewhat guiltily to the dress on the floor.

"Mrs. Carter orders me around just as if I was a machine," she reiterated, in a tone of self-defence.

"An' it 's orderin' around ye 've got to learn to take in this world," said Ellen. "If ye occasionally get a 'thank ye,' thrown in, ye can think yourself lucky — it 's more 'n I get. I 've darned Mr. Harry's socks for eleven years, an' never a word o' notice does he take — I 'm doubtin' he even knows they 're darned.

'T is a thankless world, Annie dear. Thirteen years I 've worked for the Jaspers, an' on top o' that to ask me for soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert on a Fort' o' July night!"

Ellen showed signs of breaking down again and Annie hastily interposed.

"Don't cry about it, Ellen; it 's too bad, it is, but Mr. Jasper likely did n't think what a lot o' trouble he was makin'. He ain't never washed no dishes an' he don't know what it 's like. I 'll come over an' help you do them."

"But ye won't be here. Ye 're goin' yerself," Ellen blubbered.

Annie was silent.

"Thirteen years an' 't is the only home I 've got."

"Don't go, Ellen," Annie begged.

"Soup, an' fish, an' roast ——"

"I 'll stay if you will!"

Ellen heaved a final shuddering sigh and wiped her eyes.

"Ye 'll have to hurry, Annie, if ye 're goin'

to get that dress done by five o'clock. Come on!" she cried, jumping to her feet. "I 'll help ye. Ye take the waist and I'll take the skirt, an' we 'll see which one gets done first. It just needs a little rubbin' out an' we 'll iron it damp."

Five minutes later, Peter and Nora, who had been sitting on the back steps, waiting patiently for Ellen's diplomacy to bear fruit, returned to the laundry. They found Ellen at one tub and Annie at another — up to her elbows in the soap suds, her cheeks still flushed, but a smile beginning to break through.

"Ellen 's helpin' me," she said in rather sheepish explanation.

"An' she 's comin' over to wash the dishes for me to-night," Ellen chimed in. "We 're havin' soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' ——"

Peter clapped his hand over his mouth and Nora cast him a warning look.

"You 're goin' to the beach with Pete to see

the fireworks, that 's where you 're goin' to-night," she said. "I 'll help Ellen with her dishes."

"Thank ye, Nora," said Ellen. " 'T is a kind heart ye 've got, an' that 's more 'n I can say for Mr. Jasper, for all I 've worked for 'im thirteen years. 'T is soup, an' fish, an' roast, an' salad, an' dessert the man 's after wantin' for dinner to-night, an' no one but me to wash a kettle. If it was n't for Annie, I 'd be leavin', I would." Ellen wrung the skirt out and splashed it up and down in the rinsing water. "An' now while this dress is dryin' ready to iron, I 'll just run home an' stir up a bit o' puddin' for dessert, if ye 'll be lendin' me some vanilla, Nora dear. That fool of a grocery b'y ——"

"Oh, take your vanilla an' get along wit' you! We 've had all we wants o' your soup an' your fish an' the rest o' your fixin's."

Nora dived into the pantry after the bottle, while the attention of the others was attracted

by a gay laugh outside the window. Annie's face clouded at the sound, and they all looked out.

Miss Ethel was coming across the lawn on her way to the bay. Mr. Lane, who was visiting at Willowbrook, strolled at her side, dressed in white boating flannels with some oars over his shoulder. A little way behind walked Mr. Harry, a second pair of oars over his shoulder, and his eyes somewhat surlily bent on the ground. Miss Ethel, pretty and smiling in her light summer gown, was talking vivaciously to Mr. Lane, apparently having forgotten that Mr. Harry existed.

"I 'd show her pretty quick if I was Mr. Harry!" Ellen muttered vindictively.

Miss Ethel paused and shaded her eyes with her hand.

"It 's awfully sunny!" she complained. "I 'm afraid I want a hat." She glanced back over her shoulder. "Harry," she called, "run back and get my hat. I think I left it on the front

veranda, or maybe at the tennis-court. We 'll wait for you at the landing."

For a moment Mr. Harry looked black at this peremptory dismissal; but he bowed politely, and whirling about strode back to the house while Miss Ethel and Mr. Lane went on laughing down the hill.

"An' she never so much as said please!" whispered Annie.

"I 'll be darned if I 'd do it," said Peter.

THEIR INNOCENT DIVERSIONS

III

THEIR INNOCENT DIVERSIONS

WE GOT three kids visitin' to our house, and there won't be nothin' left o' Willowbrook by the time they goes away. Hold up, Trixy! What are ye tryin' to do?"

Peter paused to hook the line out from under Trixy's tail, and then re-cocking his hat at a comfortable angle and crossing his legs, he settled himself for conversation. Peter loved to talk and he loved an audience; he was essentially a social animal. His listeners were two brother coachmen and a bandy-legged young groom, who were waiting, like himself, for "ladies' morning" to draw to its usual placid termination — sandwiches and lemonade on the club veranda after a not too heated putting contest on the first green.

"Yes, we got three visitin' kids; with Master Bobby it makes four, and I ain't drawed an easy breath since the mornin' they arrived. They keep up such an everlastin' racket that the people in the house can't stand them, an' we 've had them in the stables most o' the time. Mrs. Brainard, that 's their mother, is Mr. Carter's sister, and I can tell ye she makes herself to home.

"That 's her over there with the lavender dress and the parasol" — he jerked his head in the direction of a gaily dressed group of ladies trailing across the links in the direction of the first green. "She 's mournin' for her husband — light mournin', that is; he 's dead two years."

"She picked me the first day to look after the la-ads. 'Peter,' she says, 'me dear boys are cr-razy to play in the stables, but I can't help worryin' for fear they 'll get under the horses' feet. I have perfect confidence in you,' she says, 'and I 'll put them under yer special

care. Just keep yer eye on the la-ads an' see that they don't get hur-rt.'

"'Thank ye, ma'am,' says I, flattered by the attention, 'I 'll do the best I can.' I had n't made the acquaintance o' the little darlin's yet, or I would 'a' chucked me job on the spot.

"Master Augustus — he 's the youngest — has gold curls an' blue eyes and a smile as innocint as honey. He 's the kind the ladies stops an' kisses, and asks, 'Whose little boy is you?' At the first glance ye 'd think to see a couple o' wings sproutin' out behind, but when ye knowed him intimately, ye 'd look for the horns an' tail. I 've pulled that little divvil three times out o' the duck pond, and I 've fished him out from the grain chute with a boat hook. I could n't tell ye the number o' trees he 's climbed after birds' eggs and got stuck in the top of; we keeps a groom an' ladder on tap, so to speak. One afternoon I caught the four o' them smokin' cigarettes

made o' dried corn silk up in the hay loft as comfortable as ye please — 't is many a stable-boy as has been bounced for less. Between them they finished up the dope the vet'rinary surgeon left when Blue Gipsy had the heaves, thinkin' it was whisky — an' serves them right, I say. I did n't tell on 'em, though, when the doctor asked what I thought the trouble was; I said I guessed it was green apples.

"But them 's only the minor divarsions that occupy their leisure; they 're nothin' to the things they think of when they really get down to business. The first thing they done was to pretend the victoria was a pirate ship; an' they scratched the paint all up a-tryin' to board her. Joe turned 'em out o' doors to play, an' they dug up the whole o' the strawberry bed huntin' for hidden treasure. Their next move was to take off their shoes an' stockin's, turn their clothes wrong side out, an' dirty up their faces with huckleberry juice — ye would have sworn they was a lot o' jabberin' Dagoes.

They went beggin' in all the houses o' the neighbourhood, includin' Willowbrook, an' Nora never knew them an' give them some cold potatoes.

"One day last week they nearly broke their blame young necks slidin' down the waggon-shed roof on a greased tea-tray. There 's a pile o' straw at the bottom that kind of acted as a buffer, but Master Augustus did n't steer straight an' went over the edge. 'T was only a drop o' four feet, but he come up lookin' damaged.

"That ain't the worst though. Last Sunday afternoon they frightened the cow into hysterics playin' she was a bull, an' they was matydoors or torydoors, or whatever ye call them. They stuck pins into her with paper windmills on the end, and she ain't give more 'n six quarts at any milkin' since. I was mad, I was, an' I marched 'em to the house an' tole their mother.

" 'It grieves me,' she says, 'to think that me boys should be so troublesome; but they

did n't mean to be cruel to the poor dumb brute. They 're spirited la-ads,' she says, 'an' their imaginations run away wid them. What they needs is intilligent direction. Ye should try,' she says, 'to enter into the spirit o' their innocint divarsions; an' when ye see them doin' somethin' dangerous, gintly turn their thoughts into another channel. Their grattytood,' she says, 'will pay ye for yer trouble.'

" 'Wery well, ma'am,' says I, not too enthusiastic, 'I 'll do the best I can,' and I bows meself out. I 've been superintendin' their innocint divarsions ever since, and if there 's any one as wants the job, I 'll turn it over to him quick."

Peter paused to back his horses farther into the shade; then having climbed down and taken a drink at a near-by hydrant, he resumed his seat and the conversation.

"But ye should have seen them this mornin' when I drove off! They was a sight if there ever was one. Joe 's away with Mr. Carter

and I 'm takin' charge for the day. When I went into the carriage-house to give Billy orders about hitchin' up, what should I find but them precious little lambkins gambolin' around in stri-ped bathin' trunks, an' not another stitch. They was further engaged in paintin' their skins where the trunks left off — an' that was the most o' them — with a copper colour foundation and a trimmin' o' black stripes.

" 'Holy Saint Patrick!' says I. 'What the divvil are ye up to now?'

" 'Whoop!' says Master Bobby. 'We 'll scalp ye and eat yer heart. We 're Comanche braves,' he says, 'an' we 're gettin' ready for the war-path.'

" 'Ye look more like zebras,' says I, 'escaped from a menagerie.'

" 'Wait till we get our feathers on,' he says, 'an' Pete,' he adds, 'will you do me back? There 's a place in the middle that I can't reach.'

"Wid that he turns a pink an' white surface a yawnin' for decoration, an' presses a can o' axle grease in me hands. And I 'll be darned if them young imps had n't covered their skins with axle grease and red brass polish, an' for variety, a touch o' bluing they 'd got off Nora in the kitchen. An' they smelt — Gee! they smelt like a triple extract harness shop. I tole them I thought they 'd be havin' trouble when they was ready to return to the haunts o' the pale-face; but Master Bobby said their clothes would cover it up.

"I done the job. I don't set up to be a mural artist, and I ain't braggin', but I will say as Master Bobby's back beat any sign-board ye ever see when I finished the decoratin'. I fastened some chicken feathers in their hair, and I hunted out some tomahawks in the lumber room, an' they let out a war-whoop that raised the roof, an' scalped me out o' grattytood.

" 'Now see here,' says I to Master Bobby,

'in return for helpin' along yer innocint amusements, will ye promise to do yer scalpin' in the paddock, an' not come near the stables? 'Cause me floor is clean,' I says, 'and I don't want no blood spattered on it. 'T is hard to wash up,' I says. I was, ye 'll observe, gintly turnin' their thoughts into another channel, like their mother recommended. An' they promised sweet as cherubs. She was right; they 're spirited la-ads, an' they won't be driven. 'T is best to use diplomacy.

"I left them crawlin' on all fours through the bushes by the duck pond, shootin' arrers in the air as innocint as ye please. I dunno, though, how long 't will last. I tole Billy to keep an eye on them, and I s'pose when I get back, I 'll find his head decoratin' the hitchin'-post an' his hair danglin' from their belts."

A movement of farewell on the club veranda brought the men back to their official selves. Peter straightened his hat, stiffened his back, and gathered up the reins.

"So long, Mike," he remarked as he backed into the driveway. "I 'll see ye to-morrow at the Daughters o' the Revolution; and if ye hear of anyone," he added, "as is wantin' a combination coachman an' first class nursemaid, give them my address. I 'm lookin' for an easier place."

"Peter," said Mrs. Carter, as they trotted out of the club-house gateway and swung on to the smooth macadam of the homeward road, "I meant to ask you what the children were doing this morning. Have they been amusing themselves?"

"Yes, they 've been amusin' themselves. They was playin' Indian, ma'am, with chicken feathers in their heads." He wisely suppressed the remainder of the costume. "I found them some tomahawks in the lumber room, an' the last I see o' them they was in the paddock scalpin' each other as happy as ye please."

"Those delicious boys!" murmured their

mother. "I never know what they will think of next. It is such a relief to get them into the country, where they can have plenty of room to play and I can be sure they are not in mischief. They are so exuberant, that when we are stopping in a summer hotel I am always uneasy for fear they may disturb the guests."

The carriage had turned into the Willowbrook grounds, and was decorously rolling along between the smooth green lawns bordered by coloured foliage, the two ladies reclining against the cushions in placid contemplation of the summer noonday, when suddenly an ebullition of shouting and crying burst out across the shrubbery in the direction of the stables. It was not the mere joyous effervescence of animal spirits that had been gladdening Willowbrook for the past two weeks. There was an unmistakable note of alarm, a hoarser undertone, as of men joining in the tocsin. Peter pulled the horses sharply to their haunches

and cocked his head to listen, while the ladies leaned forward in a flutter of dismay.

"Something has happened to my precious boys! Drive on quick, Peter," Mrs. Brainard gasped.

Peter used his whip and they approached the house at a gallop. The trouble was evident by now. Heavy clouds of smoke were curling up from among the willow trees while the cry of "Fire! Fire!" filled the air.

"Thank heaven it ain't the stables!" ejaculated Peter, as his eye anxiously studied the direction. " 'T is the waggon-shed — an' the buckboard 's in it an' all the farmin' tools."

People were running from every side. Two men from Jasper Place came puffing through the hole in the hedge, dragging a garden hose behind them, while the house servants, bareheaded and excited, swarmed out from the back veranda.

"Annie! Annie!" called Mrs. Carter as the panting horses were dragged to a standstill,

"turn on the fire alarm. Go to the telephone and call the engine house."

"Simpkins has done it, ma'am," called Annie over her shoulder, as she hurried on. "Ow! What 's that?" she added with a scream of astonished terror, as a red and black striped figure, with a row of ragged feathers waving in a fringe about its ears, burst from the shrubbery and butted plump against her.

"Bobby!" gasped his mother, as after a moment of shocked hesitation she recognized her son. Bobby waved his arms and set up a howl. An expression of terror was plainly visible struggling through the war-paint.

"Pete, Billy, Patrick! Quick! Quick! We can't untie him and he 's burning! We did n't mean to burn him," he added quickly. "It 's an accident."

"Burn what?" cried Mrs. Carter.

"Augustus," Bobby sobbed.

And to the horror-stricken group was borne

a shrill falsetto wail: "Help! H-e-l-p! They 're burning me at the s-t-a-k-e!" — a wail apparently of mortal anguish, though an unexcited listener would have detected in the tones more of anger than of pain.

Mrs. Brainard, with a frenzied shriek, threw away her lavender parasol and dashed in the direction of the sounds. Peter jumped from the box and overtook her. He was first upon the spot. The waggon-shed roof was a blazing mass; the straw pile beneath it was sending up a stifling cloud of blue smoke, and the dry surrounding grass was crackling in a swiftly widening circle. But in the centre of the conflagration there still remained a little oasis of green, where a young willow sapling rose defiantly from the flames. And as the smoke blew momentarily to one side, the writhing figure of Augustus came to view lashed firmly to the tree trunk, his hands above his head. With the arrival of spectators he finished struggling and assumed an expression

of stoicism that would have done credit to a true Comanche.

"My boy! My boy!" shrieked Mrs. Brainard, running forward with outstretched arms, as the smoke again closed around him.

Peter caught her. "Stand back, ma'am. For heaven's sake, stand back! Ye 'll ketch yer dress. He ain't hurt none; the fire ain't reached him. I 'll save him," and whipping out his knife, Peter dashed into the smoke. He returned three minutes later, a mass of stripes and mingled grease kicking in his arms.

Mrs. Brainard, who had closed her eyes preparing to faint, opened them again and looked at Augustus. He was a muddy copper colour with here and there a vivid touch of blue, and he exuded a peculiarly blent odour of brass polish and smoke.

"Is — is he dead?" she gasped.

"He 's quite lively, ma'am," said Peter, grimly struggling to hold him.

She opened her arms with a sob of relief, and received the boy, grease and smoke and all; while the three remaining braves modestly tried to efface themselves.

"Robert," said Mrs. Carter, laying a detaining hand on her son's tri-coloured shoulder, "what is the meaning of this outrageous affair?"

Bobby dug his eyes with his greasy fists and whimpered.

"We just tied him to the stake and pretended to burn him. And then we sat down to smoke a pipe of peace, and I guess maybe the straw caught fire."

"It did — apparently," said his mother; her tone carried a suggestion of worse to come.

Peter, having hastily organized a fire brigade, succeeded in saving the buckboard and a few of the farming tools, but the building itself was beyond salvation. The wood was dry and thoroughly seasoned, and the feeble stream of water from the garden hose served to increase the smoke rather than to lessen the flames.

The men finally fell back in a panting circle and watched it burn.

"Gee!" ejaculated Peter, "I'm glad it was the waggon-shed. It might have been the stables."

"Or the house," added Mrs. Carter.

"Or Augustus!" breathed Mrs. Brainard.

The roof fell in with a crash, and the flames leaped up to surround it. A mild cheer broke from the spectators; since there was nothing more to be done, they might as well enjoy the bonfire. The cheer was echoed by an answering shout at the end of the avenue, and a moment later the Sea Garth volunteer hook and ladder company dashed into sight, drawn by two foam-covered horses, the firemen still struggling into belated uniforms.

They came to a stand; half a dozen men tore off the nearest ladder and dragged it to the burning building. There, they hesitated dubiously. It was clearly an impossible feat to lean a thirty-foot ladder against a one-story waggon-shed whose roof had fallen in.

Their chief, an impressive figure in a scarlet shirt and a rubber helmet, advanced to take command. He grasped the painful situation, and for a moment he looked dashed. The next moment, however, he had regained his poise, and announced, in a tone of triumph; "We 'll save the stables!"

Mrs. Carter stepped forward with a voice of protest.

"Oh, no, I beg of you! It is n't necessary. The sparks are flying in the other direction. My own men have fortunately been able to cope with the fire, and while I am very much obliged for your trouble, there is no necessity for further aid."

"Madam," said the chief, "the wind is likely to change at any moment, and a single spark falling on that shingle roof would sweep away every building on the place. I am sorry to be disobliging, but it is my duty to protect your property." He waved her aside and issued his orders. For the first time in her

life Mrs. Carter found that she was not master on her own place.

Five minutes later half a dozen ladders were resting against the main edifice of the stables, while the bucket brigade was happily splashing the contents of the duck pond over the shingle roof.

This precautionary measure was barely under way, when a second shouting and clanging of bells announced the approach of the Sea Garth Volunteer Hose Company No. 1. They did not possess horses and their progress had of necessity been slower. Accompanied by an excited escort of barefooted boys, they swept like a tidal wave across shaven lawns and flowered borders.

"Keep them back! Keep them back!" wailed Mrs. Carter, in a sudden access of helplessness. "Peter, William, stop them! Thank them and send them home." She accosted the hook and ladder chief. "Tell them it 's all over. Tell them that you yourself have already done everything that 's necessary."

"Sorry, Mrs. Carter, but it 's impossible. There has n't been a fire in this town for the last three months, and then it was only a false alarm. They 're sore enough as it is because we got here first. A little water won't hurt anything; we 're in need of rain. You go in the house, Mrs. Carter, and trust to me. I won't let them do any more damage than necessary."

The hose company bore down upon the scene of confusion that surrounded the wrecked waggon-shed with an air of pleased expectancy. Their faces fell as they caught sight of the pitiable size of the fire; but the new chief, with quickly reviving cheerfulness, usurped dictatorship, and soon had a generous stream of water playing upon the embers.

Mrs. Carter, with a last plaintive appeal to Peter to get rid of them, resumed her natural aloofness; and she and Mrs. Brainard trailed their smoke-grimed splendour toward the house, driving the vanquished braves before them.

When, finally, the last spark was irretrievably

dead, the duck pond was nearly dry and everything else was wet, the firemen reloaded their ladders and hose, their buckets and rubber helmets, and noisily trundled away. The Willowbrook contingent sat down and mopped their grimy brows.

"Will you look at my flower-beds?" mourned Tom. "Walked right over 'em, they did."

"An' will ye look at the clothes on the line?" cried Nora. "They walked slap through them wid their dir-rty hands."

"Go and look at the carriage-house floor," Peter growled. "They turned a three-inch stream o' water in at the front door; it looks as if the flood o' Arrerat had struck us. If I ever ketch that lobster of a fire chief out alone, I 'll teach 'im 'is dooty, I will." He paused to examine his person. "Gee! but I blistered me hands." He carried the examination further. "An' these is me best pants," he muttered. "The next time I helps along their innocint divarsions, I 'll get me life insured."

DIGNITY AND THE ELEPHANT

IV

DIGNITY AND THE ELEPHANT

"COME in!"

Peter opened the library door and advanced with awkward hesitation. Behind his respectfully blank expression there was visible a touch of anxiety; he was not clear in his own mind as to the reason for this peremptory summons to the house. It might mean that he was to be rewarded for having saved Master Augustus's life and the contents of the waggon-shed; it might mean that he was to be censured for any one of a dozen innocent and unpremeditated faults. But Mr. Carter's expression as he turned from the writing table banished all doubt as to the meaning of the interview. His bearing contained no suggestion of honourable mention to come.

"Close the door," he said dryly.

Peter closed the door and stood at attention, grasping with nervous fingers the brim of his hat. Mr. Carter allowed a painful silence to follow while he sat frowning down at a newspaper spread on the table before him. Peter, having studied his master's face, lowered his troubled eyes to the headlines of the paper:

COMANCHE BRAVES ON THE WAR PATH

FIRE THREATENS DESTRUCTION
TO JEROME B. CARTER'S ESTATE

"This has been a very shocking affair," Mr. Carter began, in a tone of impressive emphasis. "The damage, fortunately, was slight, but the principle remains the same as if every building on the place had burned. The blame on the surface rests with the boys who started the fire; and," he added, with a touch of grimness, "they have been fittingly punished. But I find, upon looking into the matter, that the blame does not stop with them. I have

here a copy of a New York evening paper of an — uh — sensational order, giving a grossly exaggerated account of the incident. There is one particular, however, in regard to which they do not exaggerate — exaggeration being impossible — and that is in their description of the outrageous apparel which my son and my nephews were wearing at the time."

Mr. Carter adjusted his glasses and picked up the paper, his frown darkening as he glanced rapidly down the column. A facetious young reporter had made the best of a good story.

"'Volunteer firemen — Gallant behaviour of Chief McDougal — Threatened tragedy — H'm ——" His eye lighted on the offending paragraph, and he settled himself to read.

"'Conspicuous among those present were the authors of the conflagration, Master Robert Carter, twelve-year-old son of Jerome B. Carter, and his three cousins, sons of John D. Brainard, of Philadelphia. Whatever may be said of Philadelphians in general, there is nothing

slow about the Brainard boys. In the character of Comanche braves the four were clothed in simple but effective costumes of black and red war-paint. The paint, we are informed, was composed of axle grease and brass polish, and had been artistically laid on by one Peter Malone, who occupies the position of head groom in the Carter stables. Young Malone has missed his calling. His talents point to the field of decorative art.'"

A fleeting grin swept over Peter's face. It struck him, for the hundredth time, that there was a singular absence of a sense of humour in the Carter family. But he quickly recomposed his features. Mr. Carter had laid the paper down again, and was waiting. Peter glanced dubiously about the room, and finally ventured in a tone of conciliation:

"It were n't so shockin' as the paper made out, sir. They was wearin' stri-ped bathin' trunks and a row o' chicken feathers in addition to the grease."

Mr. Carter waved the remark aside as irrelevant.

"That has nothing to do with the point. The question which I am discussing is the fact that you painted my son with axle grease. I am not only shocked, but astonished. I have always entertained the highest opinion of your sense of propriety and fitness. I should have believed this story a pure fabrication on the part of an unprincipled reporter, had I not heard it corroborated from Master Bobby's own lips. Before passing judgment it is only right that I hear your version of the affair. What have you to say?"

Peter shifted his weight uneasily. An invitation to tell a story rarely found him wanting, but he liked to feel that his audience was with him, and in the present instance Mr. Carter's manner was not surcharged with sympathy.

"Well, sir," he began, with an apologetic cough, "If ye 'll excuse me mentionin' it,

them three Brainard boys is young limbs o' Satan, every one o' them. Their badness, so to speak, is catchin', an' Master Bobby 's got it. 'T is demoralizin', sir, to have them about; I'm losin' me own sense o' right an' wrong."

"Very well," said Mr. Carter, impatiently, "what I want to hear about is this Indian business."

"Yes, sir, I'm comin' to it, sir. Yesterday mornin' I got an order early to drive Mrs. Carter to the country club, an' when I went into the carriage-house to see about hitchin' up, what should I find but them four little div——"

Peter caught Mr. Carter's eye, and hastily altered his sentence.

"I found the four young gentlemen, sir, dressed in stri-ped bathin' trunks, engaged in paintin' their skins with axle grease ready for the war-path. They 'd got two cans on before I seen 'em, and all I done was Master

Bobby's back an' Master Wallace's legs. I mistrusted it would n't come off, sir, and I told 'em as much; but they was already so nearly covered that it seemed a pity to spoil the sport. Ye see, I was mindin' what their mother said about takin' a sympathetic interest in their innocint divarsions."

"And this struck you as an innocent diversion?"

"Comparatively speakin', sir. None o' their divarsions strikes me as fittin' for a Sunday-school."

"Go on," said Mr. Carter, sharply.

Peter fumbled with his hat. He was finding his employer's mood a trifle difficult.

"It were n't my fault about the fire, sir. When I drove off they was playin' in the paddock as innocint as ye please. How should I know that as soon as me back was turned they 'd be takin' it into their heads to burn Master Augustus at the stake? It ain't no ordinary intilligence, sir, that can keep up wid

them. And as for the damage, there would n't 'a' been none, aside from losin' the waggon-shed, if it were n't for that meddlin' fire department. Ye see for yerself the mess they made."

He came to a sudden pause, and then added with an air of reviving cheerfulness:

"'T was bad, sir, but it might have been worse. We saved the buckboard, an' we saved the garden tools, to say nothin' o' Master Augustus."

Mr. Carter grunted slightly, and a silence followed, during which Peter glanced tentatively toward the door; but as his companion gave no sign that the interview was at an end, he waited. Mr. Carter's eye had meanwhile travelled back to the paper, and his frown was gathering anew. He finally faced the groom with the deliberative air of a counsellor summing up a case.

"And you think it consonant with the dignity of my position that a New York paper should be able to print such a statement as that in regard to my son?"

Peter smiled dubiously and mopped his brow, but as no politic answer occurred to him, he continued silent.

"There is another matter which I wish to speak of," added Mr. Carter, with a fresh assumption of sternness. "I am informed that you called the boys, in their presence," he paused, as though it were painful for him to repeat such malodorous words — "*damned little devils!* Is that so?"

Peter sighed heavily.

"I don't know, sir. I might 'a' said it without thinkin'. I was excited when I see the roof a blazin' and I may have spoke me mind."

"Are you not aware, Peter, that such language should never, under any circumstances, be used in Master Bobby's presence?"

"Yes, sir, but if ye 'll pardon the liberty, sir, there's times when the Angel Gabriel himself would swear in Master Bobby's presence."

"That will do, Peter. I won't bandy words

with you any further; but I wish this to be a warning. You are now head groom — I was even considering, as you know well, the advisability of advancing you still further. Whether or not I do so will depend upon yourself. I regret to say that this episode has shaken my confidence."

There was a sudden flaring of anger in Peter's eyes. He recalled the long years of honest service he had given Mr. Carter, a service in which his employer's interest had always been his own; and his Irish sense of justice rebelled. It was on his tongue to say: "I 've worked ten years at Willowbrook, and I 've always done my best. If my best is not good enough, you 'll have to look for another man. Good evening, sir."

But he caught the words before they were spoken. Since Annie had come to Willowbrook, Peter's outlook on life had changed. If a secret dream concerning himself and her and the coachman's cottage were ever to come

true, he must swallow his pride and practise wisdom. His mouth took a straighter line, and he listened to the remainder of his master's homily with his eyes bent sulkily on the floor.

"Had it been one of the other grooms who was guilty of using such language before my son, and of committing such an — er — unpardonable breach of decorum as to paint him with axle grease, I should have discharged the man on the spot. Your past record has saved you, but I warn you that it will not save you a second time. In future, I shall expect you to set an example to the under stablemen. You never find me forgetting the dignity of my position; let me see that you remember the dignity of yours. You may go now."

Mr. Carter dismissed him with a nod, and turned back to the desk.

Annie was waiting in the kitchen to hear the history of the interview. Peter stalked through the room without a word, his face set in

ominous lines. She followed him to the back veranda, and caught him by the coat lapel.

"What 's the matter, Petey? What are you mad at? Did n't he thank you for savin' the things?"

"Thank nothin'," Peter growled. "Do the Carters ever thank you? All the blame is fixed on me for the things them little divvels do — *damn* little divvels — that's what they are. 'An' is it fittin',' says he, 'that ye should use such language before Master Bobby?' Lor'! I wish he could hear the language Master Bobby used before me the time he fell into Trixy's manger. I 'd like to meet Mr. Carter in the open once, as man to man. I 'd knock him out in the first round with me right hand tied behind me."

Peter was clearly fighting mad.

"I 'd like to get a whack at that reporter what wrote that paper. Young Malone has missed his callin', has he? I 'd show him where young Malone's talents lie; I 'd knock

him into the middle o' next week. 'Gallant work o' Chief McDougal.' Bloomin' lobster in a rubber helmet. I 'll teach him his dooty if I ever ketch him out alone. It was me as saved the buckboard an' all the tools, an' Master Augustus in the bargain — wish I 'd let him burn, I do. 'An',' says Mr. Carter, 'do ye think it consonant wid the dignity o' me position,' he says, 'that me son should be painted with axle grease — me — the Honourable Jerome B. Carter, Esquire?' His dignity! Take away his money an' his dignity, an' there would n't be enough of him left to fill a half-pint measure. I 'll get it back at him; you see if I don't. I risks me life and I burns me best pants, an' that 's all the thanks I get!"

A week had passed over Willowbrook. The charred ruins of the waggon-shed had been carted to the barnyard; the Comanche braves had become white again — though in the course of it they had lost a layer of skin — and the

subject of axle grease and brass polish had been allowed to fade into the past. Mr. Carter, having once eased his mind, had banished all rancour from his thoughts. Being a lawyer, with influence in high places, he had received an unexpectedly adequate insurance, and he was beginning to regard the matter as a funny after-dinner story. But Peter persisted in being sulky. Though his blistered hands were healed, his wounded feelings were still sore. As he drove his employer to and from the train, he no longer permitted himself the usual friendly chatter; his answers to all queries were respectful but not cordial. Peter was steadfastly determined to keep Mr. Carter in his place. Meanwhile, he was looking longingly for the chance to "get it back." And suddenly the chance presented itself — fairly walked into his hands — a revenge of such thoroughgoing appropriateness that Peter would have held himself a fool to let it slip.

The yearly circus had arrived — the Nevin

Brothers' Company of Trick Animals and Acrobats — and every billboard in the village was blazing with pictures of Rajah, the largest elephant in captivity. The Nevin Brothers confined themselves to one-night stands. On the day of the performance, Peter, having driven Mr. Carter to the station, stopped on his way home at Scanlan's to have the shoe tightened on Trixy's off hind foot. The shop was just around the corner from the vacant lot where the tents were going up, and while he was waiting, Peter strolled across to watch.

To his surprise and gratification he discovered that the elephant trainer was a boyhood friend. Arm in arm with this distinguished person, he passed by the curious crowd of onlookers into the animal tent for a private view of Rajah. Once inside, and out of sight, it transpired that his friend would be obliged if Peter could lend him a dollar. Peter fortunately had only fifty cents about him; but the friend accepted this, with the murmured

apology that the boss was slow in forwarding their wages. He more than paid the debt, however, by presenting Peter with a pass for himself and "lady," and Peter drove home in a pleasant glow of pride and expectation.

He submitted the pass to Annie, and drove on to the stables, casually informing the groom who helped him unhitch that he had gone to school with Rajah's trainer, and wished he had a dollar for every time he 'd licked him.

Toward seven o'clock that evening, as Peter was happily changing from plum-coloured livery into checked town clothes, a telephone call came out from the house, ordering the waggonette and the runabout. "Yes, sir, in fifteen minutes, sir," said Peter into the mouthpiece, but what he added to the stable boy would scarcely have been fit for Master Bobby's presence. He tumbled back into his official clothes, and hurried to the kitchen to break the news to Annie.

"It 's all up with us," said Peter gloomily. "They 've ordered out the two rigs, and both

Billy an' me has to go — if it had only been ten minutes earlier they 'd uv caught Joe before he got off."

"'T is a pity, it is, an' you with the lovely pass!" she mourned.

"Why the dickens should they take it into their heads to go drivin' around the country at this time o' night?" he growled.

"They're goin' to the circus themselves!" said Annie. "Miss Ethel 's after havin' a dinner party; I was helpin' Simpkins pass the things, and I heard them plannin' it. The whole crowd 's goin' — all but Mrs. Carter; she don't like the smell o' the animals. But Mr. Carter 's goin' and all four boys — Master Augustus was in bed an' they got him up an' dressed him. They 're laughin' an' carryin' on till you 'd think they was crazy. Mr. Harry Jasper pretended he was a polar bear, an' was eatin' Master Augustus up."

"Mr. Carter 's goin'?" asked Peter, with a show of incredulity. "An' does he think it

consonant wid the dignity o' his position to be attendin' circuses? I would n't 'a' believed it of him!"

"He 's goin' to help chaperon 'em."

"I 'm glad it ain't for pleasure. I 'd hate to think o' the Honourable Jerome B. Carter descendin' so low."

"I 'm to serve supper to 'em when they come home, an' I 'll have somethin' waitin' for you on the back stoop, Pete," she called after him as he turned away.

Peter and Billy deposited their passengers at the entrance of the main tent, and withdrew to hitch the horses to the fence railing. A number of miscellaneous vehicles were drawn up around them — mud-spattered farmers' waggons, livery "buggies"—but private carriages with liveried coachmen were conspicuously lacking. Peter could not, accordingly, while away the tedium of waiting with the usual pleasant gossip; as for opening a conversation with Billy, he would as soon have thought

of opening one with the nearest hitching-post. Billy's ideas were on a par with Billy's sparring, and in either case it was a waste of breath to bother with him.

Peter sat for a time watching the crowd push about the entrance, the pass burning in his pocket. Then he climbed down, examined the harness, patted the horses, and glanced wistfully toward the flaming torches at either side of the door.

"Say, Bill," he remarked in an offhand tone, "you stay here and watch these horses till I come back. I 'm just goin' to step in an' see me friend the elephant trainer a minute. Sit on the lap robes, and keep yer eye on the whips; there 's likely to be a lot o' sneak thieves around." He started off, and then paused to add, "If ye leaves them horses, I 'll come back an' give ye the worst tannin' ye ever had in yer life."

He presented his pass and was admitted. The show had not begun. A couple of clowns

were throwing sawdust at each other in the ring, but this was palpably a mere overture to keep the audience in a pleasant frame of mind until the grand opening march of all the animals and all the players — advertised to take place promptly at eight, but already twenty minutes overdue. Peter, aware that it would not be wise to let his master see him, made himself as inconspicuous as possible. Hidden behind the broad back of a German saloon-keeper, he drifted with the crowd into the side tent, where the animals were kept.

Here, vociferous showmen were urging a hesitating public to enter the side-shows, containing the cream of the exhibit, and only ten cents extra. Vendors of peanuts and popcorn and all-day-suckers were adding to the babel, while the chatter of monkeys and the surly grumbling of a big lion formed an intoxicating undertone.

Across the tent, gathered in a laughing group about the elephant, Peter caught sight of the Willowbrook party — the ladies in fluffy, light

gowns and opera coats, the gentlemen in immaculate evening clothes. They were conspicuously out of their element, but were having a very good time. The bystanders had left them in a group apart, and were granting them as much attention as Rajah himself. The elephant, in scarlet and gold trappings, with a canopied platform on his back, was accepting popcorn balls from Master Augustus's hand, and Master Augustus was squealing his delight. Above the other noises Peter could hear his former schoolmate declaiming in impressive tones:

"Fourteen years old, and the largest elephant in captivity. Weighs over eight thousand pounds, and eats five tons of hay a month. He measures nine feet to the shoulders, and ain't got his full growth yet. Step up the ladder, ladies and gentlemen, and get a bird's-eye view from the top. Don't be bashful; there's not the slightest danger."

Mr. Harry Jasper and Master Bobby ac-

cepted the invitation. They mounted the somewhat shaky flight of steps, sat for a moment on the red velvet seat, and with a debonair bow to the laughing onlookers, descended safely to the ground. They then urged Mr. Carter up, but he emphatically refused; his dignity, it was clear, could not stand the strain.

"Step up, sir," the showman insisted. "You can't get any idea of his size from the ground. There 's not the slightest danger. He 's as playful as a kitten when he 's feeling well."

Miss Ethel and one of the young men pushed Mr. Carter forward; and finally, with a fatuous smile of condescension, he gave his overcoat to Master Bobby to hold, his walking-stick to Master Augustus, and having settled his silk hat firmly on his head, he began climbing with careful deliberation.

Peter, hidden in the crowd, fingering in his pocket the dollar he had intended to spend, suddenly had an infernal prompting. His revenge spread itself before him in tempting

array. For one sane moment he struggled with the thought, but his unconquerable sense of humour overthrew all hesitation. He slipped around behind Rajah and beckoned to the trainer. All eyes were fixed upon Mr. Carter's shining hat as it slowly rose above the level of the crowd. The two men held a hurried consultation in a whisper; the bill inconspicuously changed hands, and Peter, unobserved, sank into the crowd again. The trainer issued a brief order to one of the bandmen and resumed his position at Rajah's head.

Mr. Carter had by this time gained the top, and with one foot on the platform and the other on the upper round of the ladder was approvingly taking his bird's-eye view, with murmured exclamations to those below.

"Stupendous! He must measure six feet across — and not reached his full growth! A wonderful specimen — really wonderful."

Rajah suddenly transferred his weight from one side to the other, and the ladder shook

unsteadily. Mr. Carter, with an apprehensive glance at the ground, prepared to descend; but the keeper shouted in a tone of evident alarm:

"Take your foot off the ladder, sir! Sit down. For heaven's sake, sit down!"

The ladder wavered under his feet, and Mr. Carter waited for no explanations. With a frenzied grasp at the red and gold trappings he sat down, and the ladder fell with a thud, leaving him marooned on Rajah's back. On the instant the band struck into "Yankee Doodle," and Rajah, with a toss of his head and an excited shake of his whole frame, fell into a ponderous two-step.

"Stop him! Hold him! The ladder—bring the ladder!" shouted Mr. Carter. His voice was drowned in the blare of trumpets.

Without giving ear to further orders, the elephant plunged toward the opening between the two tents and danced into the ring at the head of a long line of gilded waggons and gaudy

floats. The grand opening march of all the players and all the animals had begun.

Peter looked at the Willowbrook party. They were leaning on each other's shoulders, weak with laughter. He took one glance into the ring, where Mr. Carter's aristocratic profile was rising and falling in jerky harmony with the music. And in the shadow of the lion cage Peter collapsed; he rocked back and forth, hugging himself in an ecstasy of mirth. "Gee! Oh, gee!" he gasped. "Will ye look at the dignity of his position now?" In one perfect, soul-satisfying moment past slights were blotted out, and those booked for the future were forgiven.

Rajah completed the circuit and two-stepped back into the animal tent drunk with glory. Half a dozen hands held the ladder while Mr. Carter, white with rage, descended to the ground. The language which he used to the keepers, Peter noted with concern, should never have been spoken in Master Bobby's presence.

The elephant trainer waited patiently until the gentleman stopped for breath, then he took off his hat and suggested in a tone of deprecation:

"Beg your pardon, sir, but the price for leading the grand march is fifty cents at the evening performance."

"I 'll have you arrested — I 'll swear out an injunction and stop the whole show!" thundered Mr. Carter, as he stalked toward the entrance.

Peter, coming to a sudden appreciation of his own peril, slipped out behind him. He ran smack into Billy who was hovering about the door.

"So I caught ye," hissed Peter. "Get back to them horses as fast as ye can," and he started on a run, shoving Billy before him. Mr. Carter, fortunately not knowing where to find the carriages, was blundering around on the other side.

"What 's yer hurry?" gasped Billy

"Get up and shut up," said Peter senten-

tiously, as he shot him toward the waggonette. "An' ye can thank the saints for a whole skin. We ain't neither of us left our seats to-night — d 'ye hear?"

To Billy's amazement, Peter jumped into the runabout, and fell asleep. A second later Mr. Carter loomed beside them.

"Peter? William?"

His tone brought them to attention with a jerk. Peter straightened his hat and blinked.

"What, sir? Yes, sir! Beg pardon, sir; I must 'a' been asleep."

Mr. Carter leaped to the seat beside him.

"Drive to the police station," he ordered, in a tone that sent apprehensive chills chasing up Billy's back.

"Yes, sir. Whoa, Trixy! Back, b-a-c-k. Get up!" he cut her with the whip, and they rolled from the circle of flaring torches into the outer darkness.

"She's a trifle skittish, sir," said Peter, in his old-time conversational tone. "The noise o'

the clappin' was somethin' awful; it frightened the horses, sir."

Mr. Carter grunted by way of response, and Peter in the darkness hugged himself and smiled. He was once more brimming with cordial good-will toward all the world. Mr. Carter, however, was too angry to keep still, and he presently burst into a denunciation of the whole race of showmen, employing a breadth of vocabulary that Peter had never dreamed him capable of.

"Yes, sir," the groom affably agreed, "It 's true what ye say. They 're fakes, every one of them, an' this show to-night, sir, is the biggest fake of all. The way they do people is somethin' awful. Fifty cents they charges to get in, an' twenty-five more for reserved seats. Extra for each of the side shows, an' there ain't nothin' in them, sir. Peanuts is ten cents a pint when ye can buy them at any stand for five, an' their popcorn balls is stale. I 've quit goin' to shows meself. I spent a dollar

in five minutes at the last one, sir. I had a good time and I ain't regrettin' the money, but 't is expensive for a poor man."

Mr. Carter grunted.

"The worst sell I ever heard of, though," Peter added genially, "is chargin' fifty cents to ride the elephant in the openin' grand march. Ye would n't think it possible that anybody 'd want to do it, but they tells me that never a night goes by but somebody turns up so forgettin' of his dignity ——"

Mr. Carter glanced at Peter with a look of quick suspicion. The groom leaned forward, and with innocent solicitude examined Trixy's gait.

"Whoa, steady, ole girl! She 's limpin' again in her off hind foot. They never shoe her right at Scanlan's, sir. Don't ye think I 'd better take her down to Gafney's in the mornin' ?"

They were approaching the station house. Peter glanced sideways at his companion, and picked up the conversation with a deprecatory cough.

"Yes, sir, the show 's a fake, sir, an' no mistake. But if I was you, sir, I would n't be too hard on 'em. 'T would n't be a popular move. If ye 're thinkin' of runnin' for judge," Peter broke off and started anew. "If ye 'll excuse me tellin' it, sir, I heard 'em sayin' in Callahan's saloon the other day that they guessed ye was a better man than Judge Benedict all right, but that ye was too stuck up. They did n't care about votin' for a man who thought he was too good to mix with them. An' so, sir, you 're appearin' at the circus so familiar like was a politic move — meanin' no offence. I know ye did n't do it on purpose, sir, but it 'll bring ye votes."

He drew up before the station house in a wide curve, and cramped the wheels and waited.

Mr. Carter appeared lost in thought. Finally he roused himself to say:

"Well, after all, perhaps there is n't any use. You may drive back and pick up the others. I 've changed my mind."

THE RISE OF VITTORIO

V

THE RISE OF VITTORIO

DAVID MACKENNA, the gardener at Jasper Place, was a Scotchman of the Scotch. He was truculent when sober, and actively pugnacious when drunk. It may be said to his credit that he was not drunk very often, and that when he was drunk he was canny enough to keep out of Mr. Jasper's way. But one night, after a prolonged political discussion at Callahan's saloon, he was unsteadily steering homeward across the side lawn just as Mr. Harry and two friends who were visiting him emerged from the gap in the hedge that divided Jasper Place from Willowbrook. The gentlemen were returning from a dinner, and were clothed in evening dress. They in no wise resembled tramps; but David's vision

was blurred and his fighting blood was up. He possessed himself of an armful of damp sods, and warily advanced to the attack. He was not in a condition to aim very straight, but the three shining shirt-fronts made an easy mark. Before his victims had recovered from the suddenness of the onslaught sufficiently to protect themselves, he had demolished three dress suits.

The next morning David was dismissed. The other workers, both at Jasper Place and Willowbrook, appreciated the justice of the sentence, but were sorry to see him go. David's argumentative temper and David's ready fists had added zest to social intercourse. They feared that his successor would be of a milder type, and less entertaining. The successor came some three days later, and Peter, observing his arrival across the hedge, paid an early call on Patrick to see what he was like. Peter returned to Willowbrook disgusted.

"He 's a Dago! A jabberin' Dago out of a ditch. He can't talk more 'n ten words, an'

he don't understand what they means. Mr. Harry picked him all right for a peaceable citizen who won't be spoilin' no dress suits. He ain't got a drop o' fight in him. Ye call him a liar, an' he smiles an' says, 'Sank you!' "

Vittorio set about the weeding of his flower-beds with the sunny patience bred of love. Whatever were his failings in English and the war-like arts, at least he understood his business. Mr. Harry watched his protégé with pleased approval. He had always admired the Italian character theoretically, but this was the first time that he had ever put his admiration to the actual test; and he congratulated himself upon finding at last the ideal gardener with the pastoral soul that he had long been seeking. Mr. Harry had no racial prejudices himself, and he took it for granted that others were as broad.

Vittorio's pastoral soul, however, won less approval among his fellow-workers. Peter did not share Mr. Harry's enthusiasm for the

Italian race, and Peter largely swayed public opinion both at Jasper Place and Willowbrook.

"It 's somethin' awful," he declared, "the way this country's gettin' cluttered up with Dagoes. There ought to be a law against lettin' 'em come in."

In so far as he was concerned, Peter refused to let Vittorio come in; and the man was consigned to social darkness and the companionship of his plants. He did not seem to mind this ostracism, however, but whistled and sang at his work with unabated cheerfulness. His baby English shortly became the butt of everybody's ridicule, but as he never understood the jokes, he bore no grudge. The only matter in which he showed the slightest personal prejudice was the fact that they all persisted in calling him "Tony."

"My name no Tony," he would patiently explain half a dozen times a day. "My name Vittorio Emanuele, same-a de king."

Tony, however, he remained.

The man's chief anxiety was to learn English, and he was childishly grateful to anyone who helped him. The stablemen took a delighted interest in his education; it was considered especially funny to teach him scurrilous slang. "Come off your perch, you old fool," was one of the phrases he patiently committed to memory, and later repeated to Mr. Harry with smiling pride at his own progress.

Mr. Harry spoke to Peter on the subject.

"Yes, sir," Peter agreed easily, "it 's disgustin', the language these Dagoes picks up. I can't imagine where they hears it, sir. They 're that familiar, ye can't pound no manners into them."

Mr. Harry wisely dropped the matter. He knew Peter, and he thought it safest to let Vittorio work out his own salvation.

Several of the practical jokes at the man s expense should, logically, have ended in a fight. Had he taken up the gauntlet, even at the expense of a whipping, they would have

respected him — in so far as Irishmen can respect an Italian — but nothing could goad him into action. He swallowed insults with a smiling zest, as though he liked their taste. This unfailing peaceableness was held to be the more disgraceful in that he was a strongly built fellow, quite capable of standing up for his rights.

"He ain't so bad looking," Annie commented one day, as she and Peter strolled up to the hedge and inspected the new gardener at work with the clipping-shears. "And, at least, he 's tall — that 's something. They 're usually so little, them Eye-talians."

"Huh!" said Peter, "size ain't no merit. "The less there is of an Eye-talian, the better. His bigness don't help along his courage none. Ye 're a coward, Tony. D 'ye hear that?"

Their comments had been made with perfect freedom in Vittorio's presence, while he hummed a tune from "Fra Diavolo" in smiling unconcern. Unless one couched one's insults

in kindergarten language and fired them straight into his face, they passed him by unscathed.

"Ye 're a coward, Tony," Peter repeated.

"Cow-ward?" Vittorio broke off his song and beamed upon them with a flash of black eyes and white teeth. "How you mean, cow-ward? No understand."

"A coward," Peter patiently explained, "is a man who's afraid to fight — like you. Eye-talians are cowards. They don't dare stand up man to man an' take what 's comin' to 'em. When they 've got a grudge to pay, they creeps up in the night an' sticks a knife in yer back. That 's bein' a coward."

The insulting significance of this escaped Vittorio, but he clung to the word delightedly. "Cow-ward, cow-ward," he repeated, to fix the syllables in his mind. "Nice word! Sank you." Then, as a glimmering of Peter's insinuation finally penetrated, he shook his head and laughed. The charge amused him.

"Me no cow-ward!" he declared. "No afraid fight, but no like-a fight. Too hard work." He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "More easy take care-a flower."

The subtlety of this explanation was lost upon Peter, and the two went their ways; the one happily engaged with his weeding and his pruning, the other looking on across the hedge contemptuously scornful.

Peter's ideal of the highest human attainment was to become a "true sport." His vocabulary was intensive rather than extensive, and the few words it contained meant much. The term "true sport" connoted all desirable qualities. Abstractly, it signified ability, daring, initiative, force; it meant that the bearer attacked the world with easy, conquering grace, and — surest test of all — that he faced defeat no less than success with a high heart. Concretely, a true sport could play polo and ride to hounds, could drive a motor-car or a four-in-hand or sail a boat, could shoot or swim

or box. All of these things, and several others, Mr. Harry Jasper could do. It was from observing him that Peter's definition had gained such precision.

The billiard-room mantelpiece at Jasper Place held a row of silver cups, relics of Mr. Harry's college days. The hall at Jasper Place testified to Mr. Harry's prowess with the rifle. A moose head decorated the arch, a grizzly bear skin stretched before the hearth, and a crocodile's head plucked from the mud of its native Nile emerged grinning from the chimney-piece. Some day Mr. Harry was going to India after a tiger skin to put over the couch; in the meanwhile he contented himself with duck-shooting on Great South Bay, or an occasional dip into the Adirondacks.

Patrick had accompanied him on the last of these trips, and it had been a long-standing promise that Peter should go on the next. Their camp was to be in Canada this year, as soon as the open season for caribou arrived.

Peter's heart was set on a caribou of his own, and as the summer wore to an end his practice with the rifle was assiduous.

Mr. Harry had set up a target down on the Jasper beach — a long strip of muddy gravel which the inlet, at low tide, left bare — and had given the men permission to shoot. One Saturday afternoon Patrick and Peter and Billy were gathered on the beach amusing themselves with a rifle and a fresh box of cartridges. The target was a good two hundred yards away. With a light rifle, such as the men were using, it was a very pretty shot to hit one of the outer rings, the bull's-eye, through anything but a lucky fluke, being almost impossible.

"Mr. Harry's givin' us a run for our money," Peter grumbled, after splashing the water behind the target several times in a vain attempt to get his range. "Ye 'd better keep out, Billy. This ain't no easy steps for little feet."

But Billy, with his usual aplomb, insisted

upon trying. After his second shot Peter derisively shouted:

"Look out, Pat! It ain't safe to stand behind him; he 's likely to hit 'most anything except the mark."

Billy good-naturedly retired and engaged himself in keeping score. The rivalry between Peter and Patrick was keen. The latter was the older hand at rifle-shooting, but Peter was the younger man and possessed the keener eye. As soon as they became accustomed to their distance they pulled into line, and the contest grew spirited. Presently Vittorio, a garden hoe in hand, came loping across the meadow, attracted by the shots. When he saw what was toward, he dropped down on the bank and interestedly watched the match. Patrick had been ahead, but his last shot went wild and splashed the water to the left of the target. Peter made the inner ring and pulled the score up even. He was in an elated frame of mind.

"Hello, Tony!" he called with unwonted affability as he paused to reload. "See that shot? Pretty near hit the bull's-eye. You don't know how to shoot — no? Eye-talians use knives. Americans use guns."

Vittorio smiled back, pleased at being so freely included in the conversation.

"I shoot-a more good dat. You no shoot-a straight; no hit middle." His tone was not boastful; he merely dropped the remark as an unimpassioned statement of fact.

Peter had raised the rifle to his shoulder; he lowered it again to stare.

"What are ye givin' us?" he demanded. "Ye think ye can shoot better 'n me?"

Vittorio shrugged. He had no desire to hurt Peter's feelings, but at the same time he saw no occasion to lie.

"Course I shoot-a more good dat," he responded genially. "I shoot-a long time. You no learn how like-a me."

"Here," said Peter, stretching the rifle toward

the man, "let me see ye do it, then! Either put up or shut up. I 'll show ye that it ain't so easy as it looks."

Vittorio sprang to his feet with an air of surprised delight.

"You let-a me shoot? Sank you! Sank you ver' moch." He took the rifle in his hand and caressed the barrel with a touch almost loving. His eyes were eager as a child's.

"Here, you, Tony," Peter warned, "don't get funny with that gun! Point it at the target."

Vittorio raised the rifle and squinted along the barrel; then, as an idea occurred to him, he lowered it again and faced the three men with his always sunny smile. He had a sporting proposition to make.

"You shoot-a more good me, my name Tony. I shoot-a more good you, my name Vittorio Emanuele, same-a de king. You call me Vittorio, I understand, I come; you call me Tony, I no understand, no come."

Peter, whatever his prejudices, was true to his ideals.

"It 's a bargain, Tony. Ye beat me shootin' and I 'll call ye any bloomin' thing ye please — providin' I can twist me tongue to it."

Vittorio's eyes sought Patrick's. He removed the pipe from his mouth and grunted.

"All-a right!" said Vittorio. "We shoot-a free time. First me, den you, den you, den me again, like dat."

Without more ado he threw the gun to his shoulder, and, scarcely seeming to sight, fired, and snapped out the empty cartridge. As the smoke cleared the three strained forward in open-mouthed astonishment. He had hit the target squarely in the centre.

"By gum! he 's done it!" Peter gasped; then, after an astonished silence, "Nothin' but luck — he can't do it again. Gi' me the gun."

Peter's surprise had not steadied his nerves; his shot went far astray, and he silently passed the rifle to Patrick. Patrick laid down his pipe,

planted his feet firmly, and made the inner ring. He passed the rifle on to Vittorio, and resumed his pipe. Patrick was a phlegmatic soul; it took a decided shock to rouse him to words.

"Let 's see ye do it again," said Peter.

Vittorio raised the rifle and did it again. His manner was entirely composed; he scored bull's-eyes as a matter of course.

Peter's feelings by now were too complicated for words. He studied the nonchalant Vittorio a moment in baffled bewilderment, then stepped forward without remark to take his turn. He sighted long and carefully, and scored the outer ring. He offered the rifle to Patrick, who waved it away.

"I 'm out."

"Don't back down," said Peter. "Ye 've got two more tries. If ye let him beat us he 'll be so darned cocky there won't be no livin' with him."

Patrick copied the Italian's shrug and passed

the rifle on. Vittorio advanced for his third turn under the keenly suspicious scrutiny of six eyes. They could not divine how such shooting could be accomplished by trickery, but, still more, they could not divine how it could be accomplished without. Vittorio sighted more carefully this time, but he made his bull's-eye with unabated precision.

"Dat make-a free time," he observed, relinquishing the rifle with a regretful sigh.

"Guess I 've had enough," said Peter. "You 're Vittorio Emanuele, same-a de king, all right. We don't appear to trot in your class. How 'd ye learn?"

"All Italian mans know how shoot — learn in de army. I shoot-a long time. Shoot-a Afric'."

"Africa!" said Peter. "You been in Africa?"

"Two time," Vittorio nodded.

"What 'd ye shoot there — lions?"

"No, no lion." Vittorio raised his shoulders with a deprecatory air. "Just man."

"Oh!" said Peter. His tone was noticeably subdued.

Mr. Harry Jasper, also attracted by the shooting, came strolling along the beach to see how the match was going, but arrived too late to witness Vittorio's spectacular exhibit. Mr. Harry considered himself a pretty good shot; he had often beaten Peter, and Peter entertained a slightly malicious desire to see him worsted once at his own game.

"Oh, Mr. Harry!" he called carelessly. "We 've been tryin' our hands at yer target, like ye said we might, an' this here new gardener-man come along an' wanted to have a try. He 's a surprisin' good shot for an Eye-talian. Ye would n't believe it, but he beat Pat an' he beat me. Would you mind shootin' with him once? I 'd like to show him what Americans can do."

Peter's tone was a touch over-careless. Mr. Harry glanced at him suspiciously, and from him to Vittorio, who was looking on with amiable aloofness, quite unaware that he was

the subject of discussion. Mr. Harry had not been entirely blind to the trials of David's peaceable successor, and he was glad to see that the man was coming to the top.

"So he 's beaten you? How does that happen, Peter? I thought you prided yourself on your shooting."

"I 'm a little out o' practice," said Peter.

Mr. Harry ran his eye over Vittorio's well-set-up figure.

"Served in the army, Vittorio?"

"Si, signore, five year."

"What corps — *Bersaglieri?*"

"Si, si!" Vittorio's face was alight. "I b'long *Bersaglieri.* How you know?"

"Thank you for your interest, Peter," Mr. Harry laughed. "I don't believe I 'll shoot with him to-day. I 'm a little out of practice myself."

Peter's face was mystified.

"The *Bersaglieri,*" Mr. Harry explained, "are the sharpshooters of the Italian army,

and a well-trained lot they are. You and I, Peter, are amateurs; we don't enter matches against them when we know what we're about."

"He did n't tell me nothin' about bein' a sharpshooter," said Peter, sulkily. "He said he learned in Africa."

"Africa?" Mr. Harry echoed. "Did you go through the campaign in Abyssinia, Vittorio?"

The man nodded.

"Surely not at Adowa?"

A quick shadow crossed his face.

"Si, signore," he said, simply; "I fight at Adowa."

"Good heavens!" Mr. Harry cried. "The fellow's fought against Menelik and the dervishes." He faced the other three, his hand on Vittorio's shoulder.

"You don't know what that means? You never heard of Adowa? It means that this chap here has been through the fiercest battle ever

fought on African soil. He was beaten — the odds against him were too heavy — but it was one of the bravest defeats in history. The Italians for three days had been marching across burning deserts in a hostile country, on half rations, and with almost no water. At the end of that time they accomplished a forced march of twenty miles by night, across hills and ravines so rough that the cannon had frequently to be carried by hand. Then, as they were, worn out and hungry, hopeless as to the outcome, they were asked to face an enemy six times larger than themselves — not a civilized enemy, mind you, but howling dervishes — and they did it without flinching. There 's not a man who went through Adowa but came out a hero."

Vittorio had watched his face; here and there he had caught a word. He suddenly threw out his arms in a spasm of excitement, his eyes blazing at the memory of the fight.

"Dat 's right! Menelik bad king — bad war.

No like-a dose peoples — me. I shoot-a fast like dis." He snatched up the rifle and crouched behind a rock; in pantomime he killed a dozen of the foe in as many seconds. He threw the rifle away and sprang to his feet. "Not enough cartridges! No can shoot-a more. Den I get-a wound; lie like-a dis." He dropped his arms and drooped his head. "How you say? Tired? Yes, ver' tired like-a baby. *Santissima Virgine!* No can move, I bleed so moch. Sun ver' hot — no water — ver' t'irsty. Den come-a dose peoples. Dey cut-a me up."

He tore open his shirt. A broad scar extended from his shoulder across his breast. He lifted his hair and showed a scar behind his ear, another on his forehead.

"Si, signore, all over my body dey cut-a me up!"

Mr. Harry frowned.

"Yes, yes, I know. It was terrible! You put up a great fight, Vittorio — sorry you

did n't do for 'em. You are brave chaps, you Italians. It 's a great thing to have gone through Adowa, something to be proud of all your life. I am glad to know you were there." He glanced at Peter sharply, then nodded and turned away.

Peter studied Vittorio, a new look in his eyes. The man's momentary excitement had vanished; he was his old, placid, sunny self again.

"I guess we made a mistake," said Peter, and he held out his hand.

Vittorio obligingly shook it, since that seemed to be expected, but he did it with smiling uncomprehension. He had never known that he had been insulted, and he did not realize that amends were necessary. A pause followed while the three men gazed at Vittorio, and Vittorio gazed at the sun, slanting toward the western horizon.

"Six 'clock!" he exclaimed, coming to a sudden realization that duty called. "I go water flower." He shouldered his hoe and

turned away, but paused to add, his eyes wistfully on the rifle: "You let-a me shoot some ovver day? Sank you. Goo'-bye."

Peter looked after him and shook his head.

"An' to think he 's a Dago! I s'pose if ye could understand what they was jabberin' about, half the time, ye 'd find they was talkin' as sensible as anybody else. 'T is funny," he mused, "how much people is alike, no matter what country they comes from." He picked up the rifle and stuffed the cartridges into his pocket. "Get a move on ye, Billy. 'T is time we was feedin' them horses."

HELD FOR RANSOM

VI

HELD FOR RANSOM

PETER, from being a care-free, irresponsible young groom, suddenly found himself beset with many and multiform anxieties. It commenced with Joe's falling through the trap-door in the ice-house and breaking his leg. While he was in the hospital impatiently recovering, Peter was put in command of the stables. The accident happened only a short time after the burning of the waggon-shed, and Peter was determined to retrieve his good name in Mr. Carter's sight. The axle grease episode remained a black spot in his career. The three Brainard boys were still at Willowbrook, but their visit was to come to an end in a week, and in the meantime they, too, were in a chastened mood. Peter marked out a diamond in

the lower meadow, and with infinite relief saw them devote themselves to the innocent pursuit of base-ball. If their enthusiasm could only be made to last out the week, he felt that the waggon-shed would be cheap at the price.

But though the boys were providentially quiescent, Peter's private affairs were not moving so smoothly. He had another reason besides mere ambition for wishing to prove himself capable of taking command in that uncertain future when Joe should resign. Heretofore, the prospect of being coachman, absolute ruler of three grooms and two stable-boys, had been sufficient goal in itself; but of late, visions of the coachman's cottage, vine-covered, with a gay little garden in front, and Annie sewing on the porch, had supplanted the old picture of himself haughtily ordering about his five underlings. He had not, however, ventured to suggest this dream to Annie. His usual daring impudence, which had endeared him to her predecessors, seemed to have de-

serted him, and he became tongue-tied in her presence. Peter had been possessed before by many errant fancies, but never by an obsession such as this. He went about his work blind to everything but the memory of her face. When he peered into the oat-bin it was Annie that he saw; she smiled back at him from the polished sides of the mail phaeton and the bottom of every bucket of water. She made him happy and miserable, exultant and fearful, all at once. Poor badgered Peter knew now what it felt like to be a brook-trout when a skilful angler is managing the reel.

This alternate hope and fear was sufficiently upsetting for one whose whole mind should have been upon his duties, but it was nothing to the state that followed. Their quarrel fell from a clear sky. He had taken her, one Sunday afternoon, to a popular amusement resort, a trolley ride's distance from Willowbrook, and had suggested refreshments in a place he remembered from the year before. It was

called the "Heart of Asia," and represented, so the man with the megaphone announced, the harem of a native prince. The room was hung with vivid draperies of gold and crimson, and dimly lighted by coloured lanterns suspended from the ceiling. The refreshments were served by maidens billed as "Circassian Beauties," but whose speech betrayed a Celtic origin.

Peter picked out a secluded table and ordered striped ice-cream. He had thought the place particularly conducive to romance, but Annie was too excited over her first introduction to the glamour of the East to give attention to anything but her surroundings.

"Ain't she wonderful?" Annie whispered, as a Circassian Beauty, in green and gold, trailed across her field of vision.

Peter shrugged in blasé, man-of-the-world fashion.

"'T is the paint an' powder an' clothes an' lights," he said sceptically. "Out in the day-

light, with her own clothes on, she would n't look so different from you."

This was not a strictly politic rejoinder, but he meant it well, and for the moment Annie was too dazzled to be in a carping mood. The gorgeous creature drew near, and set their ice-cream upon the table. She was turning away, after a casual glance to make sure that they had spoons and ice-water and paper napkins, when her eyes lighted upon Peter. Her second glance was not so casual; it lingered for a moment on his face. Peter had never visited the place but once in his life, and that the summer before, when he had spent an inconsequential half hour in chaffing the girl who served him. The incident had completely faded from his mind; but the girl had a diabolical memory and a love of mischief.

"Hello, Peter Malone!" she laughed. "You have n't been around much lately. I guess you don't care for me any more."

Peter's face — for no reason on earth but

that he felt Annie's questioning eyes upon him — took on a lively red. Annie transferred her gaze and studied the Circassian Beauty at close range. After some further reminiscences, audaciously expansive on her part, gruffly monosyllabic on Peter's, the girl withdrew with a farewell laugh over her shoulder; and Annie's eyes returned to Peter, an ominous sparkle in their depths.

"I 've had all I want o' this place," she observed, pushing away her dish of ice-cream.

Peter followed her outside, aware of a chilly change in the atmosphere. He anxiously ventured on an explanation, but the more he explained, the more undue prominence the incident acquired.

"Ye need n't be apologizin'," said Annie, in an entirely friendly tone. "Ye 've got a perfect right to go anywhere ye please, an' know anyone ye please. It 's none o' my business."

She bade him good-night with an air of cheer-

ful aloofness, thanking him politely for an "interestin' afternoon." Her manner suggested that there was nothing to quarrel about; she had been mistaken in her estimate of Peter, but that was not his fault; in the future she would be more clear-seeing. This wholly reasonable attitude failed to put Peter at his ease. He passed a wakeful night, divided between profanity when he thought of the Circassian Beauty, and anxiety when he thought of Annie.

In the morning the plot thickened.

A fourth youngster was spending a few days at Willowbrook — another Brainard, cousin to the three who were already there; but, providentially, he was only thirteen months old, and had not learned to walk. Peter accepted the arrival without concern, never dreaming that this young gentleman's presence could in any degree affect his own peace of mind. The baby, however, had lost his nurse, and while they were searching a new one Annie volunteered to act as substitute. The morning

after her visit to the Heart of Asia saw her ensconced on a rustic bench under an apple tree on the lawn, the perambulator at her side. The tree was secluded from the house by a mass of shrubbery, but was plainly visible from the stables. It was also closely adjacent to the grounds of Jasper Place, and this morning, by a fortuitous circumstance, Vittorio was clipping the hedge.

It had never entered Peter's mind to regard Vittorio as a possible rival; but now it suddenly occurred to him that the man was good looking — not according to his own ideals, but in a theatrical, exotic fashion, sure to catch a woman's eye. It also occurred to him that Vittorio's conversation was diverting — again from a woman's point of view. There was something piquant in the spectacle of a broad-shouldered, full-grown man conversing in the baby accents of a child of three. Peter went about his work that day, bitterly aware of the by-play going on under the apple tree. Annie

had undertaken the task of teaching Vittorio English, and the lessons were punctuated by the clear ring of her merry laugh.

In the evening the man was enticed to the back veranda, where he sat on the top step singing serenades to his own accompaniment on the mandolin, while the maids listened in rapt delight. Even Miss Ethel added her applause; overhearing the music, she haled Vittorio and his mandolin and Italian love songs to the front veranda to entertain her guests. Peter, who had never been invited to entertain Miss Ethel's guests, swallowed this latest triumph with what grace he might. The irony of the matter was that it had been Peter himself who had first rescued Vittorio from social obscurity, and who had insisted to the other sceptical ones that the man was "all right," in spite of the misfortune of having been born in Italy instead of in Ireland. He had not hoped to be taken so completely at his word.

In this sympathetic atmosphere Vittorio expanded like a flower in the sunlight. He had suddenly become a social lion. His funny sayings were passed from mouth to mouth, and everybody on the place commenced conversing in Italian-English.

"Eh, Peta!" Billy hailed him one afternoon, "Mees Effel, she want-a go ride. She want-a you go too. I saddle dose horsa?"

"Aw, let up!" Peter growled. "We hears enough Dago talk without them as knows decent English havin' to make fools o' themselves."

While Peter's private troubles were thus heavy upon him, his official responsibility increased. Mr. Carter was called away on business. On the morning of the departure, as they were starting for the station, Miss Ethel ran after them with a forgotten umbrella. "Take care of yourself, dad!" She kissed him good-bye, and stood on the veranda waving her handkerchief until the carriage was out of sight.

Mr. Carter settled himself against the cushions with a sigh.

"What a world this would be without women!" he murmured.

"Yes, sir," Peter agreed gloomily, "an', beggin' yer pardon, what a hell of a world it is with 'em, sir."

The following few days strengthened this opinion. Vittorio's education progressed, while Annie still maintained her attitude of superior aloofness. Her manner was friendly — exactly as friendly to Peter as to any of the other men. The intangibility of the quarrel was what made it hardest to bear. Could he have punched some one it would have eased his mind, but in all fairness he was forced to acknowledge that the "Dago" was not to blame. The advances were blatantly from Annie's side.

In the meantime, however, a new complication had developed, which acted in a measure as a counter irritant. Mr. Carter's train was

barely out of hearing, when the most extraordinary amount of petty thieving commenced. Nothing could be laid down anywhere about the place but that it immediately disappeared. There had been a number of Armenian women in the neighbourhood selling lace, and Peter would have suspected these had not the list of stolen articles been so unusual. It comprised the clothes-line, half a dozen sheets and the wash-boiler, six jars of jam from the cellar, and some bread and cake from the pantry window, a bundle of stakes for training the tomato plants, and Master Wallace's spelling book (he was having to study through vacation, and he bore the loss with composure), a Japanese umbrella-holder from the front veranda, a pair of lap-robes from the stable, and last, most uncanny touch of all, the family Bible! This had stood on the under shelf of the table in the library window, where it could be reached easily from the outside; but, as Peter dazedly inquired of the world in general,

"Why the divvil should anyone be wantin' to take a Bible? It can't do him no good when it 's stolen."

It was Annie who had discovered this last depredation in the course of her daily dusting. As yet the family had not noticed the loss of any of the articles, and Peter, fearing that the matter might reflect upon his own generalship, had hesitated about reporting it; none of the things were very valuable, and he had daily expected to find the thief. The boys knew, however, and took an open delight in the situation. Anything approaching a mystery was food and drink to them. They abandoned base-ball, and gave themselves over entirely to a consideration of the puzzle.

The day the lap-robes disappeared, they were gathered in a group outside the stable, Peter tipped back in an old armchair pulling furiously at his pipe, with a double frown the length of his brow, the four boys occupying the bench in an excited, chattering row.

"Perhaps the place is haunted!" Master Jerome put forth the suggestion with wide eyes.

"Haunted nothin'," Peter growled. "It was a pretty live ghost that got off with them lap-robes durin' the two minutes the stable was empty."

"They were the old ones," Bobby consoled him. "At least it was kind of him not to take the best ones when they were just as convenient."

"Do you fink it 's gypsies?" Master Augustus asked the question with a fearful glance over his shoulder. He had been told that gypsies carried off bad little boys.

"I don't know what it is," Peter said sullenly, "but if I ever ketches anybody snooping about this place who has no business to snoop ——" The sentence ended in a threatening silence.

The four boys looked at one another and shuddered delightedly.

"It 's like a book," Master Wallace declared. "The miscreant has foiled us at every turn."

"Let's form a detective bureau!" Bobby rose to the occasion. "You can be chief of the local police, Peter. And since you find the mystery beyond your power to solve, you have called to your aid a private detective force — that's us. Jerome and Wallace and me can be detectives, and Augustus can be a policeman."

"I want to be a detective, too," objected Augustus.

"It's nice to be a policeman," soothed Bobby. "When we've tracked down the thief, we'll call to you and say, 'Officer, handcuff this man!' and you'll snap 'em on his wrist and lead him to jail."

"All right!" agreed Augustus. "Give 'em to me."

"Later, when we're on his track," said Bobby. "Now, Peter, you ought to plan a campaign. 'Course, you aren't expected to find out anything, the local police never do; but nominally we're under your orders, so you must tell us to shadow some one."

Peter had been staring into space only half attending to their prattle. Bobby jogged his elbow.

"Pay attention, Peter! We're waiting for orders. You ought to detail two plain-clothes men to watch the gates, and I think it would be well to shadow Vittorio. He's a foreigner, you know; maybe he b'longs to the Black Hand. I should n't wonder if he was planning to blow up the stables. Only," he added, as an afterthought, "it 's sort of hard shadowing a man who stands by the hedge all day talking to Annie."

Peter's frown darkened as his gaze sought the rustic bench under the apple tree. He had little spirit left for the boys' diversions, but he roused himself to say:

"I 'll turn the details o' the case over to you, Master Bobby. Guard the gates, an' shadow anyone that seems suspicious. I'm drivin' Joe's wife to the hospital this afternoon; ye can report at six o'clock, when I gets back."

The four rose and saluted; they held a whis-

pered consultation, and crept warily away in different directions. Peter watched them out of sight with a wan smile, then turned inside to hitch up. The ladies of the family were spending the day in the city on a midsummer shopping expedition, so he had no fear of any demands issuing from the house. He called the under-groom, gave him strict orders not to leave the stables alone a minute, and drove on to the cottage to pick up Joe's wife. She packed a basket for the invalid into the back of the cart, and climbed up beside Peter.

"I 'm fetching him out something to eat," she explained. "They don't give him nourishment enough for a kitten. A man of Joe's size can't keep up his strength on beef tea and soft-boiled eggs."

As they drove through the gate, a small figure sprang out from the bushes in front of the astonished Trixy's head.

"I 'm sorry to detain you," said Bobby, with dignified aloofness — his expression suggested

that he had never seen Peter before — "but my orders are to search every person leaving the premises."

"Lord love you, Master Bobby! What are you playing at now?" inquired Joe's wife with wide-eyed amazement.

"I am Robert Carter, of the Secret Service," said Bobby, icily, as he walked to the rear of the buckboard and commenced his search. "Ha! What is this?" He raised the towel that covered the basket and suspiciously peered inside. It contained two pies, a quantity of doughnuts, and a jar of cherry preserves. "Madam, may I ask where you obtained these articles?" His manner was so stern that she stammered her reply with an air of convicted guilt.

"I — I made them myself. They 're for Joe in the hospital."

"H'm!" said Bobby. "As they are for charitable purposes, I will not confiscate the entire lot." He gravely abstracted two of the most

sugary doughnuts and transferred them to his pocket. "These will be sufficient to exhibit at headquarters with a description of the rest. Please favour me with your names and addresses."

Peter complied in all seriousness. Evidently, his was a case of dual personality; he represented the local police only when he was not acting as coachman. He drove on with an amused grin. After all, the boys and their escapades added to the dull routine of daily life a spice of adventure which most twentieth century households lacked; the entertainment they furnished paid for the trouble they caused.

Three hours later Peter set down Joe's wife at the door of the cottage and drove on to the stables. As he rounded the corner, he perceived an excited group gathered under the apple tree where he had left Annie and her kindergarten class.

"There he is!" cried Nora. "Peter! Come here quick."

Peter threw the lines to an adjacent groom — the one who had been told not to leave the stables — and hurriedly joined the circle. He found Annie collapsed on her bench beside the baby-carriage, rocking back and forth, and sobbing convulsively, while the other servants crowded about her.

"What 's the matter?" he gasped.

"They 've stolen the baby!" Annie wailed.

Peter felt a cold chill run up his back as he peered into the empty carriage. For a moment he was silent, struggling to grasp the full horror of the fact; then he laid a hand, none too lightly, on Annie's shoulder, and shook her into a state of coherence.

"Stop yer noise an' tell me when it happened."

"Just now! Just a few minutes ago. The baby was asleep, an' Vittorio, he had some new flowers in the farther bed, an' he wanted me to tell him their name. I was n't gone more 'n five minutes, an' when I come back I peeked in to see if the baby was all right, an' the

carriage was empty! We 've hunted everywhere. He 's gone — stolen just like the lap-robes."

Annie buried her head in her arms and commenced sobbing anew. Peter's face reflected the blankness of the others.

"Lord! This is awful! What will its mother be sayin' ?"

Annie's sobs increased at this agonizing thought.

"It's them Armenian-lace women," Nora put in. "Master Bobby says they 're gypsies, and are always stealing babies and holding them for ransom."

"Have n't ye done anything ?" he cried. "Did n't ye telephone for the p'lice ?"

"Master Bobby would n't let us. He says the local police are blind as bats and what we need are detectives. An' above all, he says, we must not let it get into the papers; his father is awful mad when anything gets into the papers. Leave it to him, he says, and he 'll have the gypsies shadowed."

"This ain't no time for play," growled Peter, whirling toward the house and the telephone. "What's that?" He stopped as his eye lighted upon a vivid sheet of paper lying on the ground.

"It was pinned to the p-pillow," Annie sobbed.

Peter snatched it up and stared for a moment in blank amazement. The words were printed in staggering characters, a bright vermilion in tone.

PLACE TEN THOUSAN POUBBLOONS
IN GOLD IN THE HOLLO OAK
BEFORE SUN RISE AND
YOUR BABY SHALL BE
RISTORED FAIL AND
YOU WONT NEVER SEE
~~HIM~~ HIM AGEN!!

A flash of illumination swept over Peter's face.

There was an old barn at the end of the lane that had been moved back when the new

stables were built. A few days before, Peter, himself unobserved, had seen Wallace knock three times on the door, and had heard a voice from inside respond:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend," said Wallace.

"Give the countersign."

"Blood!"

"Pass in," said the voice.

The door had opened six inches while Wallace squeezed through. Peter had supposed it merely their latest play, unintelligible but harmless; now, however, he commenced putting two and two together. Evidently, his was not the only case of dual personality.

"Gee! I 'm a fool not to have thought of it," he muttered.

"Oh, Pete!" Annie implored. "Do you know where he is?"

Peter controlled his features and gravely shook his head.

"I can't say as I do, exactly, but this here

paper furnishes a clue. I think p'raps I can find the baby without calling in the p'lice." He faced the others. "Go back to the house and watch out that none o' them gypsy women comes prowlin' around." He waited until they were out of hearing, then he sat down on the bench by Annie. "I'll find the kid on just one condition — ye 're to let that Dago alone. D' ye understand?"

"Get the baby, hurry — please! I 'll talk to you afterward."

"I think I 'll be talkin' just a second now. Ye know well enough I never had nothin' to do with that Circassian Beauty girl."

"Yes, yes, Pete! I believe you. I know you did n't. Please go."

"Stop thinkin' o' the kid a minute an' listen to me." He reached over and grasped her firmly by the wrist. "If I fetches him back without no hurt before his mother gets home, will everything be just the same between us as before I took ye to that infernal Heart of Asia?"

"Yes, Pete, honest — I promise." Her lips trembled momentarily into a smile. "I knew you did n't have nothing to do with her. I just wanted to make you mad."

His grasp tightened.

"Ye succeeded all right."

"Ow, Pete, let me go! You hurt."

He dropped her wrist and rose to his feet.

"Mind, now, this is on the straight. I finds the kid an' we 're friends again."

She nodded and smiled into his eyes. Peter smiled back, and swung off, whistling, down the lane. A rustling behind the hedge, and a scampering of feet, warned him that the enemy had posted scouts. He stilled his whistle and approached the old barn warily. It presented a blank face when he arrived; the door was shut and locked. He pounded three times. A startled movement occurred inside, but no challenge. He pounded again, more insistently, pushing with his shoulder until there was the sound of straining timber.

"Who goes there? Give the countersign," issued from the keyhole in Master Augustus's tones.

"Blood!" said Peter, with grim emphasis.

A pause followed, during which he kept his ear to the crack. A whispered consultation was going on inside, then presently, a small window opened and Master Augustus's head appeared.

"Oh, Pete! Is dat you?" There was relief in his tone. "Wait a minute an' I 'll let you in. I was 'fraid it was gypsies."

"Well, it ain't gypsies; it 's the local p'lice on the track o' stolen goods. You open up that door an' be quick about it!"

A long wait ensued while Augustus ineffectually fumbled with the lock, talking meanwhile to Peter in as loud a voice as possible to drown the sound of movement behind him. The door was finally flung wide, and Peter was received with a disarming smile. He stepped inside and peered about.

"Where have ye hid the other boys?" he demanded.

"I 'm a p'liceman," lisped Augustus, with engaging inconsequence, "stationed here to guard de lane. I fought it was safest to keep de door locked for fear some more gypsy people might come along."

"Where 's the ladder gone to that loft?"

"De ladder?" Augustus raised wide innocent eyes to the hole in the ceiling. "Maybe de same person stole de ladder as stole de ovver fings."

"Maybe," Peter assented genially, as he squinted up through the opening.

The end of the ladder was visible, also the end of a rope-ladder, easier to haul up in emergencies. The clothes-line at least was accounted for. Peter took off his coat, shoved a saw-horse under the opening, and sprang and caught the edge of the scuttle, while Augustus, in a frenzy of remonstrance, danced below and shouted warnings. After a few convulsive

kicks Peter swung himself up and sat down on the edge of the scuttle to get his breath, while he took a preliminary survey of the room. There was no doubt but that he had tracked the robbers to their den. Opposite him, in letters a foot high, the legend sprawled the length of the wall:

> TOM SAWYER'S ROBBER GANG

As his eyes roved about the room they lit on one familiar object after another. The four walls were hung with sheets; two pirate flags of black broadcloth (he recognized his lap-robes) fluttered overhead; the centre of the room was occupied by the umbrella-stand, upside down, serving as a pedestal for the Bible, and the tomato stakes, made into cross swords, decorated the walls. The booty was there, but the thieves had escaped. A second, more thorough examination, however, betrayed in a shadowy corner, a slight bulging of the sheets,

while sundry legs protruded from below. Peter stalked over, and laying a firm grasp on the nearest ankle, plucked out Master Wallace from behind the arras. He set the boy on his feet and shook him.

"What have ye done with that baby?"

Wallace dug his fists into his eyes and commenced to whimper. Peter tried another cast, and fetched out Master Bobby.

"Hello, Pete!" said Bobby, with cheerful impudence.

"You cough up that baby," said Peter.

"He 's in the wash-boiler." Bobby waved his hand airily toward the opposite end of the room.

Peter, still grasping Bobby's collar with a touch unpleasantly firm, strode across and raised the lid. The baby was sleeping as peacefully as in his own perambulator.

"We were just going to return him when you came." Bobby's voice contained an increasing note of anxiety. "We fed him and

sterilized his milk just like Annie does. He 's been having a bully time, laughing and crowing to beat the band. He likes adventures. It 's terribly stupid lying all day in that carriage; a little change is good for his health."

Peter shook his captive. "What 's the meanin' o' this?" His gesture included the entire interior.

"We 're robbers," said Bobby, stanchly. "I 'm Huck Finn, the Red-handed, and Jerome 's Tom Sawyer, the Terror of the Plains. When we saw that baby left alone in the carriage, we thought we ought to teach Annie a lesson. We meant to turn into detectives pretty soon and raid this robber den and take the baby back. We were just getting ready to be detectives when you came."

"This is one time the local police got in first," observed Peter. "What 's that Bible for?"

"To take our oaths on."

"Huh! I guess yer mother will be havin' somethin' to say to that." He lowered the

ladder and faced the robbers. There were three by this time: Jerome had emerged of his own accord. "I 'll take the baby meself. Master Bobby, ye follow with the Bible; Master Jerome, ye rip the skull an' bones off them lap-robes, fold 'em up neat, an' put 'em in the closet where they b'long. I 'll give ye just half an hour to break up this gang an' return the loot. Master Augustus!" Peter bellowed down the trap, "fetch four pairs o' handcuffs an' have these robbers at the p'lice station in half an hour to hear their sentence."

He shouldered the baby with awkward care, and retraced his steps toward the house. Annie was still drooping on her bench. Peter approached softly from behind.

"Here he is like I promised."

"Oh, Pete! Is he hurt?" She snatched the child from his arms and commenced anxiously examining his limbs for injuries. The baby grabbed her hair and cooed. She covered him with kisses. "Where 'd you find him?"

"I found him — where I found him," said Peter, cannily, "an' don't ye be leavin' him alone again."

"I won't! I can't never thank you enough."

"Yes, ye can — by not flirtin' with that Dago any more."

"I was n't flirtin' with him; he don't care nothin' about me. All he wants is to learn to talk."

Peter looked sceptical.

"Honest, Pete! It 's the livin' truth. I never flirted with no one, except — maybe you."

Peter's face softened momentarily, but it hardened again as a shadow fell between them. Vittorio was standing on the other side of the hedge.

"You find-a dat baby?" he inquired with an all-inclusive smile. As the fact was self-evident, nobody answered. Vittorio was a romantic soul; he caught the breath of sentiment in the air. "Annie you girl?" he inquired genially of Peter.

Peter scowled without speaking.

"I got-a girl too, name Marietta. Live-a Napoli. Some day I send-a money, she come Americ'; marry wif me. Nice girl, Marietta. Annie nice girl, too," he added, as a polite afterthought. "You marry wif her?"

Peter's face cleared.

"Some day, Vittorio, if she 'll be havin' me." He stole a side glance at Annie. She rose with a quick flush.

"Quit your foolin', Pete! 'T is time this baby was getting his supper. Would you mind settin' his carriage on the porch? Good night, Vittorio." She tucked the baby under her arm and started, singing, for the house.

Peter put up the carriage and sauntered toward the stables in the utmost good humour. He found Augustus with his prisoners drawn up in line, their wrists and ankles shackled together.

Augustus saluted. "I caught free robbers." he observed. "De ovver one 'scaped."

Peter drew his face into an expression of judicial sternness. "What have ye got to say for yourselves?" he growled.

There was silence for a moment, then Jerome ventured: "We 're going away in three days. I should n't think at the very end you 'd want to have hard feelings between us."

"If you tell mother," Bobby added, "you 'll get Annie into an awful lot of trouble. Annie's been good to me. I 'd hate to have her get a scolding."

Peter suppressed a grin.

"Ten years at solitary confinement is what ye deserve," he announced, "but since there 's extenuatin' circumstances, I 'll let ye go free on parole — providin' ye play base-ball all the rest o' the time."

"I say, Pete, you 're bully!"

"It 's a bargain," said Peter. "*An' mind ye keep to it.* Officer, set free the prisoners."

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S UNDERSTUDY

VII

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S UNDERSTUDY

"WAIT a moment, Peter," Miss Ethel called from the veranda, as he was starting for the village with the daily marketing list. "I want you to drive around by Red Towers on your way home and leave this note for Mrs. Booth-Higby."

"Very well, Miss Ethel." Peter reined in Trixy and received the note with a polite pull at his hat brim.

"And, Peter, you might use a little discretion. That is — I don't want her to know ——"

"You trust me, Miss Ethel; I 'll fix it."

Her eyes met his for a second and she laughed. Peter's face also relaxed its official gravity as he pocketed the note and started off. He understood well the inner feelings with which she

had penned its polite phrases. A battle had been waging in the Carter family on the subject of Mrs. Booth-Higby, and the presence of the invitation in Peter's pocket proved that Miss Ethel was vanquished.

The invitation concerned a garden party to be given at Willowbrook on the evening of the fifteenth, with the Daughters of the Revolution as guests of honour, and amateur theatricals as entertainment. Peter knew all about it, having arduously assisted the village carpenter in the construction of rocks, boats, wigwams, log-cabins and primæval forests. He knew, also, that the chief attraction of the evening would not be the theatricals, but rather the presence of a young Irish earl who was visiting Mr. Harry Jasper. Miss Ethel was also entertaining guests, and the two households formed an exclusive party among themselves. The entire neighbourhood was agog at the idea of a live lord in their midst, but so far no one had seen him, except from a distance, as he was

whirled past in Mr. Harry's motor, or trailed across the golf links in Miss Ethel's wake. She was planning to exhibit him publicly on the night of the garden party.

The question of invitations had been difficult, particularly in the case of Mrs. Booth-Higby. In regard to this lady society was divided into two camps, comprising those who received her and those who did not. Miss Ethel was firm in her adherence to those who did not, but her father and mother had tacitly slipped over to the other camp — Mr. Carter being a corporation lawyer, and Mr. Booth-Higby a rising financier. Peter likewise knew all about this, Mrs. Carter and her daughter having discussed the matter through the length of a seven-mile drive, while he sedulously kept his eyes on the horses' ears, that the smile which would not be suppressed might at least be unobserved.

Mrs. Carter had maintained that, since Mrs. Booth-Higby was a member of the Society, not

to invite her would be too open a slight. Miss Ethel had replied that the party was purely a social affair — she could invite whom she pleased — and she had added some pointed details. The woman's maiden name, as everyone knew, was Maggie McGarrah, and her father, previous to his political career, had kept a saloon; she was odious, pushing, *nouveau riche;* she dyed her hair and pencilled her eyebrows, she did n't have a thought in the world beyond clothes, and she flirted outrageously with every man who came near. Peter's smile had broadened at this last item. It was, he shrewdly suspected, the keynote of the trouble. Miss Ethel had caught Mr. Harry Jasper paying too assiduous attention to Mrs. Booth-Higby's commands on the occasion of a recent polo game.

Peter felt that when Mrs. Carter and her daughter matched wills, the result was pretty even betting, and his sporting instincts were aroused. He had been interested, upon delivering the

invitations, to see that there was none for the Booth-Higbys; and now his interest was doubly keen at receiving it three days late. Miss Ethel had succumbed to the weight of superior argument.

He turned in between the ornate gates of Red Towers — the two posts surmounted by lions upholding a mythical coat of arms — and drew up in the shadow of an imposing *porte-cochère*. A gay group of ladies and gentlemen were gathered in lounging chairs on the veranda, engaged with frosted glasses of mint julep; while Mrs. Booth-Higby herself, coifed and gowned as for an evening reception, was standing in the glass doors of the drawing-room. As her gaze fell upon Peter she strolled toward him with a voluminous rustle of draperies.

"Whose man are you?" she inquired, with an air of languid condescension.

Peter's face reddened slightly. The entire group had ceased their conversation to stare.

"Mr. Jerome Carter's," he replied, fumbling for the note.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Booth-Higby, with a lifting of the eyebrows.

"It should have come three days ago," Peter glibly lied. "Miss Carter give me a lot o' them to deliver; this one must have slipped down the crack between the cushions an' got overlooked. We come across it this mornin' when we was washin' the buckboard, so I drove over with it on me way home from the marketin'. I hope that it ain't important, and that ye won't feel called upon to tell Miss Carter? It would get me into trouble, ma'am."

Her face had cleared slightly during this recital; it was evident that she knew about the garden party, and had entertained emotions over the absence of her own invitation. She saw fit now to work off her stored-up anger upon the delinquent. Peter knew his place, and respectfully swallowed the scolding, but he did it with a cordial assent to Miss Ethel's

description of the lady's character She ended by bidding him wait for an answer. He heard her say, as she swept down the veranda:

"Excuse me a moment while I answer this note. It 's from Ethel Carter, Jerome Carter's daughter, you know"— evidently this was a name to conjure with — "an invitation to meet Lord Kiscadden. It should have come three days ago, but their man stupidly forgot to deliver it. He is begging me not to report him, though I feel that such carelessness really ought to be punished." She rustled on into the house, and Peter sat for twenty minutes flicking the flies from Trixy's legs.

"An' she 's a daughter o' Tim McGarrah!" he repeated to himself. There had been nothing snobbish about Tim; he was hail-fellow-well-met with every voter east of Broadway. "She 's ashamed of him now," Peter reflected, "and won't let on she ever heard the name; but the old man was ten times more a gentleman than his daughter is a lady, for all his saloon!"

His cogitations came to an end as Mrs. Booth-Higby rustled back, a delicately tinted envelope in her hand and a more indulgent smile upon her lips.

"There are to be theatricals?" she inquired, in a note of forgiveness.

"I believe so, ma'am."

"Is Lord Kiscadden to take part?"

"Can't say, ma'am."

Peter, as scene-shifter, had had ample opportunity to study Lord Kiscadden's interpretation of the character of George Washington — his lordship, with a fine sense of humour, had himself selected the rôle — but at mention of the name, Peter's face was blank.

"Is he to remain much longer at Jasper Place?" she persisted.

"Have n't heard him say, ma'am."

She abandoned her pursuit of news, handed him the note, and graciously added ten cents.

Peter touched his hat gravely, murmured, "Thank ye, ma'am," and drove away. At

the foot of the lawn the Booth-Higby peacock — supposedly a decoration for the Italian garden, but given to wandering out of bounds — trailed its plumage across his path. Peter shied his ten cents at the bird's head, with the muttered wish that the coin had been large enough really to accomplish damage.

The day of the garden party showed a clear sky above, and Peter was up with the dawn and at work. Miss Ethel had appointed him her right-hand man, and though he had the entire stable and house force to help him, he found the responsibility wearing. He was feeling what it was to be a Captain of Industry. He superintended the raising of a supper tent on the lawn, strung coloured electric bulbs among the branches of the trees, saw the furniture moved out of the drawing-room and a hundred camp chairs moved in. He spent the afternoon shifting scenery for the dress rehearsal; but finally, close upon six, he shoved Plymouth Rock back into place for the first tableau,

and, with a sigh of relief, turned toward the kitchen. He felt that he had earned a fifteen-minutes' chat with Annie.

But fresh trouble awaited him. He found Mrs. Carter and Nora in anxious consultation. The ice-cream had not come; and the expressman, who had already met three trains, said that he could not deliver it now until morning.

Mrs. Carter pounced upon Peter.

"Is Miss Ethel through with you? Then drive to the station immediately and meet the six-twenty train. If it is n't on that, stop at Gunther's and tell them they will *have* to make me seven gallons of ice-cream before ten o'clock to-night. It 's disgraceful! I shall never engage Perry to cater again. And tell the expressman that I consider him very disobliging," she threw after him.

An hour and a half later he dumped three kegs of ice and brine on the back veranda, and was turning away, cheered by the near hope of his

long-postponed supper when Annie hailed him from the kitchen window.

"Hey, Pete! Wait a minute. Miss Ethel said, as soon as you got back, for me to send you to the library."

"What are they wantin' now?" he growled. "I 'll be glad when that bloomin' young lord takes himself home to Ireland where he b'longs. Between picnics an' ridin' parties an' clambakes an' theatricals, I ain't had a chance to sit down since he come."

Annie shoved a chair toward him.

"Then now's your chance, for he 's gone. A telegram came calling him away, an' Mr. Harry's just back from motoring him to the station."

"Praise be to the saints!" said Peter, and he turned toward the library door.

He found Miss Ethel, the two young ladies who were visiting her, and Mr. Harry Jasper gathered in a pensive group before the gauze screen that stretched across the front of the stage.

"Here he is!" cried Miss Ethel, with an assumption of energy. "Put on this hat and wig, Peter, and stand behind the screen. I want to see what you look like."

Peter apathetically complied. He had received so many extraordinary commands during the past few days that nothing stirred his curiosity.

"Bully!" said Mr. Harry. "Never 'd know him in the world."

"We 'll lower the lights," said Miss Ethel. "Fortunately the gauze is thick."

"Peter," Mr. Harry faced him with an air of tragic portent, "a grave calamity has befallen the state. The rightful heir has been spirited away, and it 's imperative that we find a substitute. I 've often remarked, Peter, upon the striking resemblance between you and Lord Kiscadden. In that lies our only hope. It 's a Prisoner of Zenda situation. Often occurs in novels. Do you think it might be carried out in real life?"

"Can't say, sir," Peter blinked dazedly.

"Be sensible, Harry!" Miss Ethel silenced him. "Peter, Lord Kiscadden has been suddenly called away, and it spoils our tableaux for this evening. Fortunately, he did n't have a speaking part. You 've watched him rehearse — do you think you could take his place?"

"Don't believe I could, ma'am." Peter's face did not betray enthusiasm.

"You 'll *have* to do it!" said Miss Ethel. "It 's too late now to find anyone else."

"You 're George Washington," Mr. Harry cut in. "Father of his country. Only man on earth who never told a lie — no one will recognize you in that part, Peter."

"Here are the clothes." Miss Ethel bundled them into his arms. "You saw Lord Kiscadden this afternoon, so you know how they go. Be sure you get your wig on straight, and powder your face *thick!* It 's half-past seven; you will have to dress immediately."

"I ain't had no supper," Peter stolidly observed.

"Annie will give you something to eat in the kitchen. We won't tell anybody except the few who are with you in the tableaux. The operetta cast have never seen Lord Kiscadden, and won't know the difference. The minute the tableaux are over you can disappear, and we will explain that you have been suddenly called away."

A slow grin spread over Peter's face.

"Are ye wantin' me to talk like him?" he inquired. His lordship's idiom had been the subject of much covert amusement among the servants; Peter could mimic it to perfection.

"I don't quite ask that," Miss Ethel laughed, "but at least keep still. Don't talk at all except to us. You can pretend you are shy."

"What did she want, Pete?" Annie inquired, with eager curiosity as he reappeared.

Peter exhibited his clothes.

"Don't speak to me so familiar! I 'm Lord

Kiscadden o' County Cark. Me family is straight descinded from the kings of Ireland, and I 'm masqueradin' as George Washington who never told a lie."

An hour later, Peter, in knee breeches and lace ruffles, with hat comfortably cocked toward his left ear, was sitting at ease on a corner of the kitchen table, dangling two buckled shoes into space, while a cigarette emerged at an acute angle from the corner of his mouth. His appearance suggested a very rakish caricature of the immortal first President. The maids were gathered in a giggling group about the young man, when Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry, also in costume, appeared in the kitchen door. The effect on George Washington was electrical; he removed his cigarette, slid to the floor, straightened his spinal column, and awaited orders.

Mr. Harry carried a make-up box under his arm. He covered the groom's face with a layer of powder, redirected the curve of his

eyebrows, added a touch of rouge, and stepped back to view the effect.

"Perfect!" cried Miss Ethel. "No one on earth would recognize him."

"Peter," Mr. Harry gravely schooled him, "these are your lines for the evening; say them after me: 'By Jove! Ripping! Oh, I say! Fancy, now!'"

Peter unsmilingly repeated his lesson.

"And no matter what anybody says to you, you are not to go beyond that. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. I 'll do me best, sir." There was an anxious gleam in Peter's eye; he was suddenly being assailed by stage fright.

"Your first appearance is in the fourth tableau, where you say good-bye to your family before taking command of the army," Miss Ethel explained. "The moment it 's over slip out to change your costume, and stay out until after the Declaration of Independence has been signed. Don't stand around the wings where people can talk to you. Now

go and wait in the butler's pantry until you are called."

Washington took an affecting leave of his family amid an interested rustling of programmes on the part of the audience; no one was unaware of the exalted identity of the hero. The applause was enthusiastic, and the curtain was twice raised. As it fell for the last time a group of historical personages from the operetta cast hovered about him with congratulatory whispers. One or two were in the secret, but the rest were not. Mr. Harry, as stage manager, waved them off.

"Clear the boards for the next scene," he whispered hoarsely. "Here, Kiscadden, you 'll have to hurry and dress. You cross the Delaware in ten minutes." With a hand on George Washington's shoulder he marched him off. "That was splendid, Peter," Mr. Harry whispered, as he shunted him into the butler's pantry. "Not a soul suspected. You stay here until you are wanted."

The Delaware was crossed without mishap, also the night watch kept at Valley Forge. Washington and Lafayette crouched over their camp fire amidst driving snow, while the audience shivered in sympathy. But unluckily, these tableaux were followed by no change of costume, and several others intervened before Peter's next appearance. As he was anxiously trying to obliterate himself in the shadow of Plymouth Rock, he heard some one behind him whisper:

"Let's cut out and have a smoke. It's deucedly hot in here."

He turned to find Miles Standish of the operetta cast, with an insistent hand on his elbow. Miles Standish, in private life, was a young man whose horse Peter had held many a time, and whose tips were always generous.

There seemed to be no polite means of escape, and Peter, with a suppressed grin, followed his companion to the veranda. It was

lighted by a subdued glow from coloured lanterns, but there was an occasional patch of dimness. He picked out a comfortable chair and shoved it well into the shadow of a convenient palm. Standish produced cigars — twenty-five-cent Havanas, Peter noted appreciatively — and the two fell into conversation. Fortunately the young man aspired to the reputation of a *raconteur*, and he willingly bore most of the burden. Peter kept his own speeches as short as possible, manfully overcoming a tendency to end his sentences with "sir." An occasional interpolation of "By Jove!" or "I say!" in imitation of Lord Kiscadden's lazy drawl, was as far as he was required to go.

He came out of the encounter with colours still flying; but a perilous ten minutes followed. As the two strolled back to the stage entrance, they were intercepted by a gay group of Pilgrim maids. Peter had coped successfully with one young man, but he realized that half a dozen

young ladies were quite beyond his powers of repartee. One of them threw him a laughing compliment on his acting, and he felt himself growing pink as he murmured with a spasmodic gulp:

"Yes, ma'am. Thank ye, ma'am — I say!"

The orchestra saved the situation by striking into a rollicking quickstep that made talking difficult. The music in the end went to Peter's heels; and grasping a blue and buff coat tail in either hand, he favoured the company with an Irish jig. This served better than conversation; the laughter and applause were uproarious, bringing down upon them the wrath of the stage manager.

"Here you people, *taisez-vous!* You 're making such a racket they can hear you inside. Ah, Kiscadden! You 're wanted on the stage; it 's time for Cornwallis to surrender." Peter was marched out of danger's way.

The surrender was followed by the operetta in which Miss Ethel was heroine. Her own

affairs claimed her, but she paused long enough to whisper in George Washington's ear:

"You may go now, Peter. You 've done very nicely. Slip out through the butler's pantry where no one will see you. Change into your own clothes and help them in the kitchen about serving supper — but don't on *any* account step into the front part of the house again to-night."

"Yes, ma'am," said Peter, meekly.

He found the entrance to the butler's pantry blocked, and he dived into the empty conservatory, intending to pass thence to the veranda, and so get around to the kitchen the outside way. But as he reached the veranda door he ran face to face into Mrs. Booth-Higby. Peter quickly backed into a fern-hung nook to let her pass. The light was dim, but his costume was distinctive; after a moment of hesitating scrutiny she bore down upon him.

"Oh, it 's George Washington! — Lord Kiscadden, I should say. I see by the programme

that your part is finished. It was so frightfully warm inside that I slipped out to get a breath of air. May I introduce myself? I am Mrs. Booth-Higby, of Red Towers. I trust that you will drop in often while you are in the neighbourhood. I have so wanted to have a chance to talk to you because you come from Ireland — dear old Ireland! I am Irish myself on the side that is n't Colonial, and I have a warm spot in my heart for everything green."

Peter manfully bit back the only observation that occurred to him while the lady rattled on:

"My Irish connection is three generations back — a younger son, you know, who came to make his way in a new land, and, having married into one of the old Colonial families, settled for good. But once Irish, always Irish, I say. My heart warms to the little ragamuffins in the street if they have a bit of the brogue. It 's the call of the blood, I suppose.

Shall we sit here? Or perhaps you have an engagement — don't let me keep you ——"

He summoned what breath was left and confusedly murmured: "Oh, I say! Ripping!"

They settled themselves on a rustic bench, and Peter, possessing himself of her fan, slowly waved it to and fro in the nonchalant manner of Mr. Harry. Mrs. Booth-Higby, fortunately, was no less garrulous than Miles Standish had been, and she rattled on gaily, barely pausing for her companion's English interpolations.

Peter's feelings were divided. He had the amused consciousness that he was being flirted with by the lady who, three days before, had so condescendingly given him ten cents. And he also had a chilly apprehension of the storm that would rise if by any mischance she discovered the hoax. But his fighting blood was up, and he was excited by past success. He abandoned his interjections and, venturing out for himself, recounted an anecdote of a

fellow countryman in an excellent imitation of Irish brogue. The effort was received with flattering applause. After all, he reassured himself, this was not his funeral, Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry must bear all blame; with which care-free shifting of responsibility he settled himself to extract what amusement there might be in the situation.

The curtain finally fell on the last act of the play, and a shuffling of feet and moving of chairs betokened that a general exodus would follow. Peter came back with a start to a realization of his predicament. While confidence in his powers of simulation had been rising steadily during the past half-hour, he still doubted his ability to deal with the audience *en masse.*

But fortunately, the first two to appear in the conservatory were Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry, engaged entirely with their own affairs, all thought of the pseudo Kiscadden put from their minds. As they became aware of the

couple in the fernery, they stopped short with a gasp of surprise.

"Why, Pet ——" Miss Ethel caught herself, and summoning a cordial tone added quickly: "Lord Kiscadden! A telegram came a long time ago — I thought you had received it? I 'm afraid they stopped the boy in the kitchen."

"Oh, I say, by Jove! Fancy now!" George Washington jumped hastily to his feet. "Pleased to know ye, ma'am," he added with a farewell duck of his head; and without waiting for further words, he vaulted the veranda railing and disappeared around the corner of the house. He lingered a moment in the shrubbery to hear her say:

"Lord Kiscadden and I have been having such an interesting evening! What a delicious accent he has! You must bring him to Red Towers, Mr. Jasper. I feel that he really belongs to me more than to you; we have discovered that we are distant connections. It seems that his grandmother, the third Lady

Kiscadden, was a McGarrah before she married. My own family name was McGarrah, and ——"

Peter put his hand over his mouth to stifle his feelings, and reeled toward the kitchen porch.

An hour later, when supper was finished, Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry Jasper slipped away from the guests and turned toward the kitchen. They paused for a moment in the butler's pantry, arrested by the sound of Peter's voice as he discoursed in his richest brogue to an appreciative group of maids. His theme was the Daughters of the Revolution — he had evidently kept his ears open during his brief introduction to society.

"Me father was a Malone, an' me mother was a Haggerty. The family settled in America in 1620 B. C., all me ancistors on both sides bein' first-cabin passengers on the *Mayflower*. We 're straight discinded from Gov'nor Bradford, an' me fifth great-grandfather was the

first man hung in the United States. Malone 's a Scotch name — it used to be Douglas, but it got changed in the pronouncin' — an' Haggerty is Frinch. I 'm eligible on both sides, an' me mother was a charter member. Yes, 't is a great society; the object of it is to keep the country dimocratic."

They pushed open the door and entered. Peter, restored to his own clothes, was seated before the kitchen table engaged, between sentences, with a soup plate full of ice-cream. He shuffled hastily to his feet as the two appeared, and with a somewhat guilty air studied their faces. He was trying to remember what he had said last.

"Peter," Miss Ethel's voice was meant to be severe, "what have you been telling Mrs. Booth-Higby?"

Peter shifted his weight anxiously from one foot to the other.

"Nothin', ma'am."

"Nothing — nonsense! She is going about

telling everybody that she is Lord Kiscadden's cousin. She never made up any such impossible story as that without help."

Miss Ethel's manner was sternly reproving, but Peter caught a gleam of malicious amusement in her eye. It occurred to him that she was not averse to an exhibition of Mrs. Booth-Higby's folly before Mr. Harry Jasper.

"I was n't to blame, Miss Ethel. I could n't get out by the butler's pantry like ye told me because the Hartridge family was blockin' the way, and I knew they'd recognize me if I come within ten feet. So I thinks to meself, I 'll go through the conservatory; but just as I reaches the door I runs plumb into Mrs. Booth-Higby.

"'Oh, me dear Lord Kiscadden,' she says, 'you was the b'y I was wantin' to see! I must tell ye,' she says, 'how I 've enjoyed yer actin'; 't was great,' she says, 'ye was the best person in the whole show.' An' wid that she puts a hand on me arm an' never lets go for

an hour and a quarter — ye know, Mr. Harry, how graspin' she is."

Peter appealed to him as one man to another.

"She begun with askin' about me estate in dear old Ireland. Bein' only eighteen months old when I left it, I could n't remember many details, but I used me imagination an' done the best I could. I told her there was two lions sittin' on the gate-posts holdin' me coat-of-arms in their paws; I told her there was two towers to the castle, and a peacock strollin' on the lawn; an' then f'r fear she 'd be gettin' suspicious, I thought to change the subject. 'Yes, 't is a beautiful house,' I says, 'but it ain't so grand as some. The biggest place in the neighbourhood,' I says, 'is Castle McGarrah' — the name just popped into me head, Miss Ethel.

"'McGarrah!' she says,'that is me own name.'

"'The divvil!' thinks I. 'I 've put me foot in it now.' But 't was too late to go back. 'Possibly the same family,' says I,

politely. 'The present owner, Sir Timothy McGarrah——'

"'Timothy!' she says, 'that was me father's name, an' me grandfather's before him.'

"'There 's always one son in ivery gineration that carries it,' says I.

"'Can it be possible?' she murmurs to herself.

"'Me own grandmother was a daughter to the second Sir Timothy,' I says, 'him as quarrelled with his youngest son an' drove him from home. Some says he went to Australia, an' some that he come to America. 'T was fifty years ago, an' all trace is lost o' the lad.'

"An' with that she says solemn like, 'The b'y was me grandfather! I see it all — he was a silent man an' he niver talked of his people; but I always felt there was a secret a preyin' on his mind. An' by that token we 're cousins,' she says. 'I must insist that ye make Red Towers yer home while ye stay in America. Me husband,' she says, 'will enjoy yer acquaintance.'

"An' while I was tryin' to tell her polite like that 't would be a pleasure, but unfortunately me engagements would require me presence in another place, you an' Mr. Harry come walkin' into the conservatory, and I made me escape."

"What ever possessed you to tell such outrageous lies?" Miss Ethel gasped.

"'T was the clothes that done it, ma'am; bein' dressed as George Washington, I could n't think o' nothin' true that was fit to say."

Miss Ethel dropped limply into a chair, and leaning her head on the back, laughed until she cried.

"Peter," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes, "I don't see but what I shall have to discharge you. I should never dare let you drive past Mrs. Booth-Higby's again."

"There 's nothin' to fear," said Peter, tranquilly. "She won't recognize me, ma'am. Mrs. Booth-Higby's eyes ain't focussed to see a groom."

A USURPED PREROGATIVE

VIII

A USURPED PREROGATIVE

PETER scooped a quart of oats into a box, took out the bottle of liniment the veterinary surgeon had left, and started, grumbling, for the lower meadow. Trixy had hurt her foot, and it was Billy's fault. A groom who knew no better than to tie a horse to a barbed-wire fence on a day when the flies were bad, ought, in Peter's estimation, to be discharged.

He had some trouble in catching Trixy and applying the liniment, but he finally accomplished the matter, and dropped down to rest in the shade of the straggling hedge that divided the grounds of Willowbrook from Jasper Place. He lighted his pipe and fell to a lazy contemplation of the pasture — his thoughts neither

of Trixy nor the cows nor anything else pertaining to his duties, but now as always playing with a glorified vision of Annie, the prettiest little parlour-maid in the whole wide world. He was completely lost to his surroundings, when the sound of pistol shots on the other side of the hedge recalled him to the present with a jerk.

"What are them young devils up to now?" he muttered, as he raised himself to look through the branches.

A group of boys was visible down on the Jasper beach, firing, somewhat wildly, toward a target they had set up on the bank. Peter squinted his eyes and peered closely; one of the boys was Bobby Carter, and Peter more than suspected that the revolver was his father's. The boy had been strictly forbidden to play with firearms, and Peter's first impulse was to interfere; but on second thoughts he hesitated. Bobby was very recently thirteen, and was feeling the importance of no longer being

a little boy. He would not relish being told to come home and mind his father.

While Peter stood hesitating, a sudden frightened squawk rang out, and he saw one of Mr. Jasper's guinea fowls fly a few feet into the air and plump heavily to the ground. At the same instant Patrick appeared at the top of the meadow, bearing down upon the scene of the crime, shouting menacingly as he advanced. The boys broke and ran. They came crashing through the hedge a few feet from Peter and made for cover in a clump of willows. Peter recognized them all — Bobby and Bert Holliday and the two Hartridge boys, the latter the horror of all well-regulated parents. He saw them part, the two Hartridge boys heading for the road, while Bobby and Bert Holliday turned toward the house, keeping warily under the bank, Bobby buttoning the revolver inside his jacket as he ran. Peter crouched under the branches and laid low; he had no desire to be called into the case as witness.

Patrick panted up to the hedge and surveyed the empty stretch of meadow with a disappointed grunt. He caught a glimpse of the Hartridge boys as they climbed the fence into the high-road, but they were too far off for recognition. He mopped his brow and lumbered back to examine the body of the guinea fowl. Poor Patrick was neither so slender nor so young as when he entered Mr. Jasper's service twenty years before; as he daily watched Peter's troubles across the hedge, he thanked the saints that the Jasper family contained no boys.

Peter waited till Patrick was well out of sight, when he rose and turned back toward the stables. He met Bobby and Bert Holliday in the lane, armed with a net, a basket, and a generous hunk of raw meat.

"Hello, Pete!" Bobby hailed him cheerily. "We 're going crabbing, Bert and me. If you hear Nora asking after some soup meat that strayed out of the refrigerator, don't let on you met it."

"Trust me!" said Peter with an answering grin; but he turned and looked after the boys a trifle soberly.

Bobby's escapade with the revolver was on a different plane from such mild misdemeanours as abstracting fishing bait from the kitchen. Peter felt keenly that Mr. Carter ought to know, but he shrank from the idea of telling. For one thing, he hated tale-bearing; for another, he had a presentiment as to the direction Bobby's punishment would take.

As an indirect result of his thirteenth birthday, the boy was to have a new horse — not another pony, but a grown-up horse — provided always that he was good. Mr. Carter, being occupied with business out of town, had not been able to give the matter his immediate attention; and poor Bobby had been dwelling on the cold heights of virtue for nearly a month. He had undergone, a week or so before, a mild attack of three-day measles which he had borne with a sweet gentleness quite foreign to

his nature. Peter had openly scouted the doctor's diagnosis of the case.

"Rats!" he remarked to Annie, after viewing the boy's speckled surface. "That ain't measles. It 's his natural badness working out. I knew it were n't healthy for him to be so good. If Mr. Carter don't make up his mind about that horse pretty soon the boy 'll go into a decline."

But at last the question was on the point of being settled. Mr. Carter, having visited every horse dealer in the neighbourhood, had, in his carefully methodical manner, almost made up his mind. The choice was a wiry little mustang, thin-limbed and built for running; he could give even Blue Gypsy some useful lessons in speed, and she had a racing pedigree four generations long. Peter had fallen in love with the mustang; he wanted it almost as much as Bobby And he realized that these next few days were a critical period; if the boy were discovered in any black offence,

the horse would be postponed until his fourteenth birthday. His father had an unerring sense of duty in the matter of punishments.

It was Saturday and Mr. Carter would be out on the noon train. Peter drove to the station to meet him, still frowning over the question of Bobby and the revolver. He finally decided to warn the boy; there would be time enough to speak if the offence were repeated. Mr. Carter proved to be in an unusually genial frame of mind. He chatted all the way out on matters pertaining to the stables; and as they drew up at the *porte-cochère* he paused to ask:

"Ah, Peter, about this new mustang for Master Bobby, what do you think?"

"He 's a fine horse, sir, though I suspicion not too well broke. But he 's got a good pair o' legs — I should say two pair, sir — an' sound wind. That 's the main thing. We can finish his trainin' ourselves."

"Then you advise me to get him?"

"I should say that ye would n't be makin' no mistake. I 'll be glad, sir, to see Master Bobby with a horse of his own. He 's gettin' too heavy for Toddles."

"Very well. I 'll do it. You may have Blue Gypsy saddled immediately after luncheon and I will ride over to Shannon Farms and close the deal."

At two o'clock Blue Gypsy stood pawing impatiently before the library door with Peter soothingly patting her neck. Mr. Carter paused on the steps to survey her shining coat with the complaisant approval of ownership.

"Pretty good animal, is n't she, Peter?"

"She is that," said Peter, heartily. "You 'd search a long time before ——"

His sentence broke down in the middle as his eye wandered to the stretch of lawn beyond the hedge. Patrick was visible hurrying toward them, a white envelope waving in his hand, plainly bent on gaining the hole in the hedge and Mr. Carter's side before that gentleman's

departure. Peter tried to cover his slip and induce his master to mount and ride off; but it was too late.

"Here, Peter, just hold her a minute longer. I think that note is for me."

Patrick with some difficulty squeezed himself through the hole — it had been made originally by Mr. Harry so that he might run over and call on Miss Ethel without having to go around; and Mr. Harry was thin. Patrick emerged with hair awry and puffing. He stood anxiously mopping his brow while Mr. Carter read the note. Peter likewise eyed his master with a touch of anxiety; he had a foreboding that the contents of the letter meant no good to the cause of the new mustang.

Mr. Carter ran his eye down the page with a quickly gathering frown and then faced the man.

"You saw my son shoot the guinea fowl?"

"No, sir — that is, sir, I ain't sure. Mr. Jasper he asked me who I thought the boys

was, and I told him I did n't get close enough to see, but I fancied one was Bobby Carter, because they run this way, and I thought I recognized Master Bobby's legs as he crawled under the hedge. I told Mr. Jasper it was only guess, but he was mad because she was one of his prize hens, and he said he 'd just drop a line to you and let you investigate. It was dangerous, he said, if Master Bobby was playin' with firearms, and you 'd ought to know it."

"Yes, certainly; I understand."

Mr. Carter raised his voice and called to the boy who was visible sprawling on a bench by the tennis-court.

"Bobby! Come here."

He pulled himself together with obedient haste and advanced to meet his father, somewhat apprehensively, as his eye fell upon Patrick.

"Bobby, here is a note from Mr. Jasper. He says that some boys were shooting at a

target on his beach this morning and killed one of his prize guinea fowls. He is not sure, but he thinks that you may have been one of them. How about it?"

Bobby looked uncomprehending for a moment while he covertly studied Patrick. The man's air was apologetic; his accusation was evidently based upon suspicion rather than proof.

"I went crabbing with Bert Holliday this morning," said Bobby.

"Ah!" his father's face cleared, though he still maintained his stern tone. "I gave you strict orders, you remember, never to touch my revolver when I was not with you?"

"Yes, father."

"You never have touched it?"

"No." Bobby's tone was barely audible.

"Speak up! I can't hear you."

"No!" snapped Bobby.

"Don't act that way. I am not accusing you of anything. I merely wish to know the truth." Mr. Carter turned to Patrick, who

was nervously fumbling with his hat. "You see, Patrick, you were mistaken. Tell Mr. Jasper that I am sorry about the guinea fowl, but that Master Bobby had nothing to do with the shooting."

He dismissed the man with a nod, and mounted and rode away.

Peter watched him out of sight, then he turned and crossed the lawn to the tennis-court. Bobby was back on his bench again engaged in carving his name on the handle of a racket, though his face, Peter noted, did not reflect much pleasure in the work. He glanced up carelessly as Peter approached, but as he caught the look in his eye, he flushed quickly, and with elaborate attention applied himself to shaping a "C."

Peter sat down on the end of the bench and regarded him soberly. He was uncertain in his own mind how he ought to deal with the case, but that it must be dealt with, and drastically, he knew. Peter was by no means a

Puritan. The boy could accomplish any amount of mischief — go crabbing instead of to Sunday-school, play fox and geese over the newly sprouted garden, break windows and hotbeds, steal cake from the pantry and peaches from Judge Benedict's orchard, and Peter would always shield him. His code of morals was broad, but where he did draw the line he drew it tight. Bobby's sins must be the sins of a gentleman, and Peter's definition of "gentleman" was old fashioned and strict.

Bobby grew restless under the silent scrutiny.

"What do you want?" he asked crossly. "If you don't look out you 'll make me cut my hand."

He closed the large blade with an easy air of unconcern, and opening a smaller one, fell to work again. The knife was equipped with five blades and a corkscrew; it was one of the dignities to which Bobby had attained on his recent birthday. Peter stretched out

his hand and, taking possession of the knife, snapped it shut and returned it.

"Put it in yer pocket an' pay attention to me."

"Oh, don't bother, Pete. I 'm busy."

"Your father will be home before long," said Peter, significantly.

"Well, fire ahead. What do you want?"

"Ye told a lie — two o' them, to be accurate. Ye were one o' them boys that shot the chicken an' ye did have the pistol."

"I did n't shoot his old chicken; it was Bert Holliday. And anyway he did n't mean to; it flew straight in front of the target just as he fired."

"He had no business to be firin'. But it 's not the chicken I 'm mournin' about; it 's the lie."

"It 's none of your business," said Bobby, sullenly.

"Then I 'll make it me business! Either ye goes to yer father an' tells him ye lied, or I will. Ye can take yer choice."

"Peter," Bobby began to plead, "he 'll not give me the mustang — you know he won't. I did n't mean to touch the revolver, but Bert forgot his air rifle, and the boys were waiting to have a shooting match. I won't do it again — honest, Peter — hope to die."

"It ain't no use, Master Bobby. Ye can't wheedle me. Ye told a lie an' ye 've got to be punished. Gentlemen don't tell lies — leastways, not direct. They hires a lawyer like Judge Benedict to do it for them. If ye keep on ye 'll grow to be like the Judge yerself."

Bobby smiled wanly. The Judge, as Peter knew well, was his chiefest aversion, owing to an unfortunate meeting under the peach trees.

"You 've told lots of lies yourself!"

"There 's different kinds o' lies," said Peter, "an' this is the kind that I don't tell. It ain't that I 'm fond o' carrying tales," he added, "but that I wants to see ye grow up to be a thoroughbred."

Bobby changed his tactics.

"Father 'll feel awfully bad; I hate to have him find it out."

Peter suppressed a grin.

"Boys ought always to be considerate o' their fathers' feelin's," he conceded.

"And you know, Pete, that you want me to have the mustang. You said yourself that it was a shame for a big boy like me to be riding Toddles."

Peter folded his arms and studied the distance a moment with thoughtful eyes; then he faced his companion with the air of pronouncing an ultimatum.

"I 'll tell ye what I 'll do, Master Bobby, since ye 're so anxious to save yer father's feelin's. I 'll agree not to mention the matter, an' ye can take yer punishment from me at the end of a strap."

Bobby stared.

"Do you mean," he gasped, "that you want to whip me?"

"Well, no, I can't say as I *want* to, but I

think it 's me dooty. If ye was a stable-boy and I caught ye in a lie like that, I 'd wallop ye till ye could n't stand."

"I never was whipped in my life!"

"The more reason ye need it now. I 've often thought, Master Bobby, that a thorough lickin' would do ye good."

Bobby sprang to his feet.

"Tell him if you want. I don't care!"

"Just as ye please. He 's over to Shannon Farms now buyin' the mustang. When he gets back an' finds his son is a liar and a coward, he 'll be returnin' that horse by telephone."

Bobby's flight was suspended while he hung wavering between indignation and desire.

"There it is," said Peter. "I won't go back on me word. Either ye keeps a whole skin an' rides Toddles another year, or ye takes yer lickin' like a man an' gets the horse. Ye can have an hour to think it over."

He rose and sauntered unconcernedly toward the stables. Bobby stared after him, several

different emotions struggling for supremacy in his freckled face; then he plunged his hands deep into his pockets and turned down the lane with an attempt at a swagger as he passed the stable door. At the paddock gate Toddles poked his shaggy little head through the bars and whinnied insistently. But Bobby, instead of bestowing the expected lump of sugar, shoved him viciously with his elbow and scuffed on. He seated himself precariously on the top rail of the pasture fence and fell to digging holes in the wood with his new knife, cogitating meanwhile the two alternatives he had been invited to consider.

They appealed to him as equally revolting. Only that morning he had carelessly informed the boys that his father was going to buy him a mustang — a brown and white circus mustang that was trained to stand on its hind legs. The humiliation of losing the horse was more than he could face. Yet, on the other hand, to be beaten like a stable-boy for telling a lie!

He had boasted to the Hartridge boys, who did not enjoy such immunity, that he had never received a flogging in his life. He might have stood it from his father — but from Peter! Peter, who had always been his stanchest ally, who, on occasion, had even deviated from the strict truth himself in order to shield Bobby from justice. The boy already had his full quota of parents; he did not relish having Peter usurp the rôle.

For thirty minutes he balanced on the fence, testing first one then the other of the horns of his dilemma. But suddenly he saw, across the fields where the high-road was visible, a horse and rider approaching at a quick canter. He slid down and walked with an air of grim resolution to the stables.

Peter was in the harness-room busily engaged in cleaning out the closet. The floor was a litter of buckles and straps and horse medicine.

"Well?" he inquired, as Bobby appeared in the door.

"You can give me that licking if you want," said Bobby, "but I tell you now, *I'll pay you back!*"

"All right!" said Peter, cheerfully, reaching for a strap that hung behind the door. "I 'm ready if you are. We 'll go down in the lower meadow where there won't be no interruption."

He led the way and Bobby followed a dozen paces behind. They paused in a secluded clump of willows.

"Take yer coat off," said Peter.

Bobby cast him one appealing glance, but his face was adamant.

"Take it off," he repeated.

Bobby complied without a word, his own face growing white.

Peter laid on the strap six times. He did not soften the blows in the slightest; it was exactly the same flogging that a stable-boy would have received under the same circumstances. Two tears slipped down Bobby's

cheeks, but he set his jaw hard and took it like a man. Peter dropped the strap.

"I 'm sorry, Master Bobby. I did n't like it any better than you, but it had to be done. Are we friends?" he held out his hand.

"No, we 're not friends!" Bobby snapped. He turned his back and put on his coat; then he started for the house. "You 'll be sorry," he threw over his shoulder.

During the next few days Bobby ignored Peter. If he had any business in the neighbourhood of the stables he addressed himself ostentatiously to one of the under men. The rupture of their friendship did not pass unmarked, though the grooms soon found that it did not pay to be facetious on the subject. Billy, in return for some jocular comments, spent an afternoon in adding a superfluous lustre to already brilliant carriage lamps.

The mustang arrived, was christened Apache, and assigned to a box stall. He possessed a slightly vicious eye and a tendency to buck,

as two of the grooms found to their cost while trying to ride him bareback in the paddock. Peter shook his head dubiously as he watched the unseating of the second groom.

"We 'll put a curb bit on that horse. I don't just like his looks for a youngster to ride."

"Huh!" said Billy, "Master Bobby ain't such a baby as everybody thinks; he can manage him all right."

Word came out from the house that afternoon that Bobby was to try the new mustang. Billy saddled the horses — Apache, and Blue Gypsy for Miss Ethel, and a cob for Peter — and led them out, while Peter in his most immaculate riding clothes swaggered after. The maids were all on the back porch and the family at the *porte-cochère* to watch the departure. Bobby would accept no assistance, but mounted from the ground with a fine air of pride. Apache plunged a trifle, but the boy was a horseman and he stuck to his saddle.

"Be careful, Bobby," his mother warned.

"You need n't worry about me," Bobby called back gaily. "I 'm not afraid of any horse living!"

Blue Gypsy never stood well, and Miss Ethel was already off. Bobby started to follow, but he wheeled about to say:

"You come, Billy; I don't want Peter."

"Bobby, dear," his mother expostulated, "you don't know the horse; it would be safer ——"

"I want Billy! I won't go if Peter has to come tagging along."

Peter removed his foot from the stirrup and passed the horse over to the groom. The cavalcade clattered off and he walked slowly back to the stables. He felt the slight keenly. He could remember when he had held Bobby, a baby in short dresses, on the back of his father 's hunter, when he had first taught the little hands to close about a bridle. And now, when the boy had his first horse, not to

go! Peter's feeling for Bobby was almost paternal; the slight hurt not only his pride but his affections as well.

He spent an hour puttering about the carriage room, whistling a cheerful two-step and vainly pretending to himself that he felt in a cheerful frame of mind. Then suddenly his music and his thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of the house telephone bell, long and insistently. He sprang to the instrument and heard Annie's voice, her words punctuated by frightened sobs.

"Oh, Pete! Is that you? Something awful 's happened. There 's been an accident. Master Bobby 's been throwed. The doctor 's telephoned to get a room ready and have a nurse from the hospital here. You 're to hitch up Arab as fast as you can and drive to the hospital after her. Oh, I hope he won't die!" she wailed.

Peter dropped the receiver and ran to Arab's stall. He led him out and threw on the harness

with hands that trembled so they could scarcely fasten a buckle.

"Why can't I learn to mind me own business?" he groaned. "What right have I to be floggin' Master Bobby?"

The young woman whom Peter brought back decided before the end of the drive that the man beside her was crazy. All that she could get in return for her inquiries as to the gravity of the accident was the incoherent assertion:

"He 's probably dead by now, ma'am, and if he is it 's me that done it."

As they turned in at the Willowbrook gate Peter strained forward to catch sight of the house. A strange coupé was drawn up before the *porte-cochère*. He involuntarily pulled Arab to a standstill and looked away, but the nurse reached out and grasped the reins.

"Here, man, what is the matter with you? Hurry up! They may want me to help get the boy in."

Peter drove on and sat staring woodenly

while she sprang to the ground and hurried forward. Mrs. Carter and the maids were gathered in a frightened group on the steps. He could hear Miss Ethel inside the carriage calling wildly:

"Do be quick! His head has commenced to bleed again."

The driver climbed down to help the doctor lift him out. They jarred him going up the steps and he moaned slightly. Peter cursed the man's clumsy feet, though not for worlds could he himself have stirred to help them. The boy's head was bandaged with a towel, and he looked very limp and white, but he summoned a feeble smile at sight of his mother. They carried him in and the servants crowded after in an anxious effort to help.

Peter drove on to the stables and put up Arab. In a few minutes Billy returned leading the two horses. He was frightened and excited; and he burst into an account of the accident while he was still half way down the drive.

"It was n't my fault," he called. "Miss Ethel said it was n't my fault. We met a mowing-machine and Apache bolted. He threw the boy off against a stone wall, and by the time I reached 'em, Apache was eating grass in the next field and Master Bobby lying in the ditch with 'is head cut open."

"I don't want to hear about it," Peter returned shortly. "Put them horses up and get out."

He himself removed Apache's new saddle and bridle and drove him with a vicious whack into the stall. Billy took himself off to find a more appreciative audience, while Peter dropped down on a stool inside the stable door, and with his chin in his hands sat watching the house. He saw the nurse fling wide the blinds of Bobby's room and roll up the shades; he wondered with a choking sensation what they were doing to the boy that they needed so much light. He saw Annie come out and hang some

towels on the line. The whole aspect of the place to Peter's sharpened senses wore an air of tragic bustle. No one came near to tell him how the boy was doing; he had not the courage to go to the house and ask. He sat dumbly waiting for something to happen while twilight faded into dusk. One of the stable-boys came to call him to supper and he replied crossly that he did n't want any supper. Presently he heard a step scrunching on the gravel, and he looked up to find Annie coming toward him.

"Is — is he dead?" he whispered.

"He 's not goin' to die. He 's feelin' better now; they 've sewed up the hole in his head. The doctor did it with a thread an' needle just like you 'd sew a dress. He took ten stitches an' Master Bobby bled awful. He never cried once, though; he just got whiter an' whiter an' fainted away. Don't feel so bad, Pete, he 's goin' to get well."

She laid her hand caressingly on his hair and

brushed it back from his forehead. He caught her hand and held it.

"It 's me that 's to blame for his gettin' hurt. He won't never speak to me again."

"Yes, he will; he 's wantin' to speak to you now. They sent me out to fetch you."

"Me?" he asked, shrinking back. "What 's he wantin' with me?"

"He 's been out of his head an' callin' for you; he won't go to sleep till he sees you. The doctor said to fetch you in. Come on."

Annie's manner was insistent and Peter rose and followed her.

"Here he is," she whispered, pushing him ahead of her into the darkened room.

Bobby made a half movement to turn as the door creaked, but a quick pain shot through his shoulder and he fell back with a little gasp.

"Take care, Bobby," the nurse warned. "You must n't move or you will hurt that bad arm." Her greeting to Peter was stern. "You may stay five minutes, and mind you don't get

him excited!" She bent over the boy to loosen the bandage about his shoulder.

"You go out," said Bobby, querulously. "I want to see Peter alone."

"Yes, dear," she patted the bedclothes indulgently. "Remember, five minutes!" she added as she closed the door.

The two left alone stared at each other rather consciously for a moment. They both felt that the occasion demanded something heroic in the way of a reconciliation, but it was the natural instinct of each to fly from sentiment. The sight of Bobby's pale face and bandaged head, however, had their effect on Peter's already overwrought nerves.

"I 'm a blunderin' fool!" he groaned. "I don't know why I can't never learn to attend to me own affairs. If I 'd told yer father, as was me dooty, he 'd never uv given ye that spotted devil of a horse."

"You are n't to blame, Pete. I guess I was hurt for more punishment 'cause I did n't take

the first in the right spirit." He fumbled under his pillow and drew out the new five-bladed knife. "This is for a remembrance, and whenever you use it you will think 'it was me that cured Bobby Carter of telling lies.'"

Peter received the gift with an air of hesitation.

"I don't like to take it," he said, dubiously, "though I have a feelin' that perhaps I ought, for with five blades to choose from ye 'll be cuttin' yer blamed young throat — I 'd hate to be the cause of any more accidents." He balanced it thoughtfully in his palm. "But I 'm thinkin," he added softly, "that the corkscrew might be doin' as much damage to me as the five blades to you."

Bobby grinned appreciatively, and held out his uninjured left hand.

"Pete," he said, "if I promise never, never to tell any more lies, will you promise never, never to use that corkscrew?"

"It 's a bargain!" said Peter, grasping the

boy's hand. "And I 'm glad that we 're friends again."

They stared at each other solemnly, neither thinking of anything further to add, when Peter suddenly became aware of the ticking of the clock.

"Holy Saint Patrick!" he ejaculated. "Me five minutes was up five minutes ago. I must be takin' me leave or that commandin' young woman will come back and eject me."

He moved toward the door, but paused to throw over his shoulder:

"I 'd already promised the same to Annie, so ye need n't be takin' too much credit to yerself fer me conversion."

MRS. CARTER AS FATE

IX

MRS. CARTER AS FATE

AS the summer wore to an end, the course of affairs between Peter and Annie became a matter of interested comment among the other servants. They had all seen Peter recover from many incipient attacks of love, but this they unanimously diagnosed as the real thing. Joe and his wife talked the matter over upon his return from the hospital, and decided that the time had definitely come for the livery stable; Peter, in all fairness, had served as groom long enough. They would move out of the coachman's cottage the following spring, and give the young people a chance. Thus was the way open for a happy conclusion, and everyone was preparing to dance at the wedding, except Peter and Annie themselves.

They alone were not certain as to the outcome. Neither was quite comfortably sure that the other was in earnest, and when it came to the point they were both a little shy. Annie, with laughing eyes, tempted Peter at every point, but when he showed a disposition to control matters himself, she precipitously fled.

The two were standing on the back veranda one moonlight night, and Annie was engaged in pointing out to Peter the lady in the moon. Peter was either stubborn or stupid; he frankly declared that he saw no "loidy," and did n't believe there was one. In her zeal in the cause of astronomy, Annie unwarily bent her head too near, and while her eyes were turned to the moon, Peter kissed her. She slapped him smartly, as a well-brought-up young woman should, and fled into the house before he could catch her. Peter, strong in his new-found courage, waited about in the hope that she would reappear; but she did not, and he finally took himself off to his room over the carriage-

house, where he sat by the window gazing out at the moonlight for two hours or more before he remembered to go to bed. The slap had hurt neither him nor his feelings; he liked her the better for it. She was n't really mad, he reflected happily, for she had laughed as she banged the door in his face.

The next morning Peter went about his work with a singing heart and many a glance toward the kitchen windows. He swashed water over the stable floor and rubbed down the horses with a mind happily intent upon what he would say to Annie when he saw her. About ten o'clock Mrs. Carter ordered the victoria, but as the carriage horses were at the shop being shod, Joe sent Peter in to ask if Trixy and the phaeton would do as well.

Peter dropped his sponge and started for the house at exactly the wrong moment for his future peace of mind. He arrived at the kitchen door just in time to see the man from the grocery put his packages on the table and

his arms around Annie, and kiss her with a smack that resounded through the room and would, to Peter's outraged senses, resound through all time. Annie turned with a startled cry, and as her gaze fell upon Peter, her face paled before the look in his eyes. Without a word he whirled about and strode back to the stables with white lips and clenched fists, and murder in his heart for the grocer's man. He did not hear what Annie said to him, nor did he know that she locked herself in her room and cried; what he did know was that she had been making a fool of him, and that she flirted with every man who came along, and that that was n't the kind of a girl he wanted to do with.

Several days before, as Peter was driving Mr. Lane, who was visiting at Willowbrook again, and Master Bobby to the village, Annie had been sweeping the front veranda as they passed, and had thrown a friendly smile in the direction of the cart. The smile was intended for

Peter, but Mr. Lane had caught it, and had remarked to Bobby:

"That 's a deuced pretty maid you 've got there."

"Annie 's the bulliest maid we ever had," Bobby had returned appreciatively. "She swipes cake for me when Nora is n't looking."

But Peter had frowned angrily, as he longingly sized up Mr. Lane, and wished he were not a gentleman so that he could punch him. It was none of Mr. Lane's business whether Annie was pretty or not.

At that time Annie could do no wrong, and Peter had not thought of blaming her for Mr. Lane's too-open admiration, but now he wrathfully accused her of trying to flirt with gentlemen, than which, in Peter's estimation, she could do no worse. As he could take it out of neither of them in blood — which his soul thirsted for — he added it to the grocer's score, and his fingers fairly itched to be at work. The grocer was just the sort of man that he

most enjoyed pummelling — big and florid, with curling hair, a black moustache, and a dimple in his chin.

Annie, after her *contretemps* with the grocer, passed a miserable day. In vain she tried to get a word with Peter; he was not to be seen. Billy was the groom who came to the house on all further errands from the stables. That evening she put on her prettiest frock and sat for two hours on the top step of the back veranda with her eyes turned expectantly toward the carriage-house, and then she went to bed and cried. Had she but known it, Peter was in a vacant lot back of Paddy Callahan's saloon, blissfully remodelling the features of the grocer's man.

Annie passed a wakeful night, and the next morning she swallowed her pride and went to the stables in the hope of seeing Peter alone. Peter, too, in spite of his victory of the evening, had kept vigil through the night. He was listlessly currying one of the carriage horses

when he saw Annie leave the house and come slowly down the walk toward the stables. His heart suddenly leaped to his mouth, but a moment later he was bending over the horse with his back to the door, whistling as merrily as though he had not a care in the world. He heard Annie's hesitating step on the threshold, and he smiled grimly to himself and whistled the louder.

"Pete, I 'm wantin' to speak to you, if ye 're not busy."

Peter glanced up with a well-assumed start of surprise. He looked Annie over, slowly and deliberately, and then turned back to the horse.

"Aw, but I am busy," he returned. "Lift up!" he added to the horse, and he solicitously examined her foot.

Annie waited patiently, struggling between a sense of pride which urged her to go back and never speak to Peter again, and a sense of shame which told her that she owed him an explanation.

"Pete," she began, and there was a little catch in her voice which went to Peter's heart; in his effort to resist it and mete out due punishment for all the misery she had caused him, he was harder than he otherwise would have been. "Pete, I wanted to be tellin' ye that it was n't my fault. He — he niver kissed me before, and I did n't know he was goin' to then."

Peter shrugged.

"Ye need n't be apologizin' to me. I ain't interested in yer amoors. If ye wants to be apologizin' to any one go an' do it to his wife."

"His wife?" asked Annie.

"Aye, his wife an' his three childern."

"I did n't know he was married," said Annie, flushing again, "but 't is no difference, for it were n't my fault. I niver acted a bit nicer to him than to anny other man, an' that 's the truth."

"Oh, ye 're a lovely girl, ye are! Flirtin'

around with other women's husbands, and lettin' every fool that comes along kiss ye if he wants to."

"Ye need n't talk," cried Annie. "Ye did it yerself, an' ye 're no better than the grocer man."

"An' do ye think I'd a-done it if I had n't knowed ye was willin?"

Annie backed against the wall, and with flushed cheeks and blazing eyes, stared at him speechlessly, angry with herself at her powerlessness to say anything that would hurt him enough. As she stood there, Master Bobby and Mr. Lane came in on their way to visit the kennels. Mr. Lane looked curiously from the angry girl to the nonchalant groom, who had resumed his work, and was softly whistling under his breath. Master Bobby, being intent only upon puppies, passed on without noticing the two, but Mr. Lane glanced back over his shoulder at Annie's pretty flushed face, and paused to ask:

"My dear girl, has that fellow been annoying you?"

"No, no!" Annie said wildly. "Go away, Mr. Lane, please."

Mr. Lane glanced from one to the other with a laugh. "Ah, I see! A lovers' quarrel," and he followed Master Bobby.

Peter echoed his laugh, and in a tone which would have justified Mr. Lane in knocking him down had he heard.

"So ye 're his dear girl too, are ye? He 's a nice gentleman, he is! Ye ought to be proud o' him."

Annie straightened herself with her head thrown back.

"Peter Malone," she burst out, "I came here to 'pologize, 'cause, without meanin' any harm, I thought as I 'd hurt yer feelin's an' was owin' an explanation. I niver had anything to do with that groc'ry man nor any other man, an' ye know it as true as ye 're standin' there. Instead o' believin' what I say like a gentleman

would, ye insult me worse than anybody 's iver done in the whole o' me life, an' I 'll niver speak to ye again as long as I live." She choked down a sob, and with head erect turned and walked back to the house.

The two had had differences before, but never anything like this. Peter, his arms dropped limply at his side, stood watching her go, while the words she had spoken rang in his ears. Suddenly a lump rose in his throat, and he leaned his head against the horse's neck.

"Lord!" he whispered. "What have I done?"

The week which followed was one of outward indifference and inward misery to both. Annie mourned when alone, but under the eyes of the stables she flirted openly and without conscience with one of the painters who was opportunely engaged in re-staining the shingle roof of the Jasper house. Peter watched her with a heavy heart, and formed a brave determination never to think of her again, and

ended by thinking of her every minute of the day. He made one awkward attempt at reconciliation which was spurned, whereupon he, too, plunged into a reckless flirtation with Mary, the chambermaid, who was fat, and every day of thirty-five. As neither Peter nor Annie had any means of knowing how wretched this treatment was making the other, they got very little comfort from it.

Annie sat at the kitchen table polishing silver with a sober face. It was six days since the grocery man's historic visit, and the war clouds showed no sign of lifting. There was a houseful of company at Willowbrook, and the work was mercifully distracting. Mary, this morning, had hung a long row of blankets and curtains on the line to air, for the sole purpose, Annie knew, of being near the stables. Peter was visible through the open window, greasing harness in the carriage-house doorway, and exchanging jocular remarks with Mary. Annie's

eyes were out of doors oftener than upon her work. Nora, who was sitting on the back veranda shelling peas, remarked on Peter's newly awakened interest in the chambermaid, but as Annie did not answer, she very wisely changed the subject.

"I guess that Mr. Lane what 's visitin' here has got a heap o' money," she called in tentatively.

"I guess he has," Annie assented indifferently.

"He seems to be pretty taken up with Miss Ethel. That was an awful becomin' pink dress she had on last night. Mrs. Carter would be pleased all right."

Annie received this remark in silence, but Nora was not to be discouraged. She felt that this new freak of taciturnity on Annie's part was defrauding her of her rights. A maid whose duties call her to the front part of the house is in a position to supply more accurate gossip than it is given a cook to know, and it is her business to supply it.

"Mr. Harry would feel awful, havin' growed up with her like," Nora continued. "He 's a sight the best lookin' o' the two, and I 'm thinkin' Miss Ethel knows it. It ud be convenient, too, havin' the places joined. The Jaspers has got money enough, an' him the only son. I guess they would n't starve if she did marry him. I 've always noticed 't is the people who has the most money as needs the most. I don't think much o' that Mr. Lane," she added.

Annie suddenly woke up.

"I don't neither. 'T is too fresh he is."

"That 's what I 'm thinkin' meself," said Nora, cordially. "An' I guess so does Mr. Harry. I 'm after observin' that he has n't been around much since Mr. Lane 's been here."

Annie's mind had wandered again. Her own affairs were requiring so much attention lately that Miss Ethel's were no longer a source of interest. Out in the stable Peter was proclaiming, in tones calculated to reach the

kitchen, "There 's only one girl in this world for me." Annie's lip quivered slightly as she heard him; a week before she had laughed at the same song, but as affairs stood now, it was insulting.

The peas finished, Nora gathered the yellow bowl under her arm and returned to the kitchen, where she concentrated her attention upon Annie and the silver.

"I 'm thinkin' ye must be in love!" she declared. "Ye 've cleaned that same spoon three times while I 've been watchin', an' ye did n't count the plates right last night for dinner, an' ye forgot to give 'em any butter for breakfast."

Annie blushed guiltily at this damning array of evidence, and then she laughed. "If it 's in love I am whiniver I forget things, then I must a-been in love since I was out o' the cradle."

"An' there 's him as would be in love with you, if ye 'd only act dacent to him — and I 'm not meanin' the painter."

Annie chose to overlook this remark, and Nora's sociability was suppressed by the entrance of Mrs. Carter.

"We have decided to have a picnic supper at the beach to-night, Nora," she said. "You will not have to get dinner for anyone but Mr. Carter."

"Very well, ma'am."

"I am sorry that it happens on your afternoon out, Annie," she added, turning to the maid, "but I shall need you at the picnic to help about serving."

"Certainly, ma'am," said Annie. "I don't care about goin' out anyway."

"We shall start early in the afternoon, but I want you to wait and help Nora with the sandwiches, and then Peter can drive you out about six o'clock in the dog-cart."

Annie's face clouded precipitously.

"Please, ma'am," she stammered, "I think — that is, if ye please ——" she hesitated and looked about desperately. "I 'm afraid if

ye 're after wantin' coffee, I can't make it right. I 'm niver sure o' me coffee two times runnin', and I should hate to be spoilin' it when there 's company. If ye could take Nora instead o' me, ma'am, I could just be gettin' the lovely dinner for Mr. Carter when he comes."

"Why, Annie," she remonstrated, "you 've always made excellent coffee before, and Nora does n't wait on the table. Is it because you want to go out this afternoon? I am sorry, but you will have to wait until Miss Ethel's guests have gone."

"No, ma'am," said Annie, hastily, "I 'm not wantin' the afternoon, an' it 's willin' I am to help Miss Ethel, only — only — will you tell Peter, ma'am, about the cart?" she finished lamely, "'cause if I tell him he 's likely to be late."

Mrs. Carter passed out of the kitchen door and crossed the lawn toward the stables, casting meanwhile a sharp eye about the premises to be sure that all was as it should be. Mary

was shaking blankets with an air of deep absorption; Peter was industriously cleaning the already clean harness, and Joe could be heard inside officiously telling Billy to grease the other wheel and be quick about it. Unless Mrs. Carter approached very quietly indeed, she always found her servants oblivious to everything but their several duties. As she drew near the doorway, Peter rose from the harness and respectfully touched his cap with a very dirty hand, while the coachman, with a final order over his shoulder to a brow-beaten stable-boy, came forward hastily, and stood at attention.

"Joe, we are going to have a picnic at the beach this afternoon, and I want you to have the horses ready at three o'clock. Miss Ethel, Mr. Lane, and Master Bobby will ride, and you will drive the rest of us in the waggonette."

"Very well, ma'am," said Joe.

"And Peter," she added, turning to the

groom, "I want you to bring out the supper with Trixy and the dog-cart at five o'clock."

"All right, ma'am," said Peter, saluting.

"Be sure to be on time," she warned. "Stop at the kitchen for Annie and the hampers promptly at five."

Peter's face suddenly darkened. He drew his mouth into a straight line, and looked sullenly down at the harness. "Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am," he mumbled, "I don't think — that is ——" He scowled defiance at Joe, who grinned back appreciatively. "If it 's just the same to ye, ma'am, I 'd like to drive the waggonette an' let Joe fetch the lunch. If I 'm to be coachman, ma'am, I 'd sort o' like to get used to me dooties before he goes."

Mrs. Carter was frankly puzzled; she could not imagine what had suddenly got into her servants this morning. A lady who has a grown daughter, of some attractions and many admirers, to chaperone, cannot be expected to keep *au courant* of her servants' love affairs.

"You have had a month in which to get used to your duties while Joe was in the hospital; that is sufficient for the present. Joe will drive the waggonette and you will follow with the supper — I wish you to help Tom put new netting in the screen-doors this afternoon."

Her tone precluded argument. As soon as she was out of hearing, Joe remarked softly, "Now, if she 'd only said Mary instead of Annie I 'spose ——"

"Aw, let up," Peter growled, and he fell to rubbing in the grease with unnecessary vehemence. His misunderstanding with Annie was a subject he would stand no fooling about, even from his chief.

At five o'clock, Peter, in a spotless top-hat and shining boots, looking as stiff as if he were clothed in steel armour, drew up before the kitchen door and piled the hampers and pails he found on the back veranda onto the seat beside him. He climbed to the box again

with an air of finality, and gathering his reins together made a feint of starting.

"Peter!" Nora called from the kitchen window. "Where is it ye're goin'? Wait for Annie."

"Annie?" Peter looked as if he had never heard the name before.

"Yes, Annie. Did ye think ye was to cook the supper yerself?"

"I did n't think nothin'," said Peter. "Me orders was to stop for the lunch at five o'clock, an' I done it. If she wants to come along she 'll have to sit on the back seat. I ain't a goin' to change these baskets again."

Annie appeared in the doorway in time to hear this ungracious speech; she clambered up to the somewhat uncomfortable footman's seat in silence, and they drove off back to back, as stiff as twin ramrods.

The cart rolled along over the smooth roads, past country clubs and summer cottages, and the only sign either of the two gave of being

alive was an occasional vicious crack of the whip from Peter when patient little Trixy showed signs of wishing to take a quieter pace. At such times Annie would instinctively stretch out a deterring hand and form her mouth as if to say, "Please, Pete, don't whip her; she 's doin' her best," and then suddenly remembering that formidable vow, would straighten up again and stare ahead with flushed cheeks.

The beach was five miles away, and there is an element of ludicrousness in the spectacle of two people in one small dog-cart riding five miles without speaking. Annie's sense of humour was keen; it struggled hard with her sense of wrong. She was never an Indian to cherish vengeance; her anger could be fierce at the moment, but it rarely lasted. And Peter was sorry for what he had said, she reminded herself; he had already tried to make up. By the end of the second mile two dimples appeared in her cheeks. At the third mile

she shut her mouth tight to keep a laugh from escaping. At the fourth mile she spoke.

"Say, Pete, why don't ye talk to me? Are ye mad?"

Peter had been gazing at Trixy's ears with an air of deep preoccupation, and he came back to the present with a start of surprise, apparently amazed at finding that he had a companion in the cart.

"Ma'am?" he said.

Annie glanced around at his uncompromising back.

"Why don't ye say somethin'?" she repeated more faintly.

"I ain't got nothin' to say."

Annie's dimples gave way to an angry flush. Never, never, never again would she say a thing to him as long as she lived. The remainder of the drive was passed in a tumultuous silence. Peter, with grim mouth, kept his unseeing eyes on the road in front, and Annie, with burning cheeks, stared behind at the cloud of dust.

When the cart arrived among the straggling cedar trees which bordered the beach, they found drawn up beside the Carter horses, Mr. Harry's hunter and a strange drag which betokened impromptu guests. Annie had barely time to wonder if the plates would go around and if there would be salad enough, when the cart was welcomed with joyful shouts by a crowd of hungry picnickers. She caught a glimpse on the edge of the group of Miss Ethel, debonair and smiling, in another new dress, with Mr. Lane scowling on one side of her and Mr. Harry on the other. Ordinarily, she would have taken a lively interest in such a situation, and would have had an appreciative fellow-feeling for Miss Ethel; but she saw it now with an unhappy sense that the blessings of this world in the shape of dresses and men are unevenly distributed.

Annie usually accepted the pranks of the young ladies and gentlemen in good part, no matter how much extra trouble they caused;

but to-day as she caught a plundering hand on one of the hampers, she called out sharply:

"Master Bobby, you let that cake alone! Them olives are for supper."

A general laugh greeted this outburst, and she turned away and began unpacking dishes with a bitter feeling of rebellion. Mrs. Carter bustled up, and having driven off the marauders, briskly took command.

"Now, Peter, as soon as you have hitched Trixy, come back and help about the supper. Annie will tell you what to do."

Annie cheered up slightly at this, and for the moment waived the letter of her vow. As Peter reluctantly reappeared, she ordered: "Get a pile o' drift wood and fix a place for the fire. Them are too big," she commented, as he returned with an armful of sticks. "Get some little pieces and be quick about it; you 're too slow."

Peter looked mutinous, but the eyes of Mrs. Carter were upon him, and he obeyed.

"Now, take those two pails and go to the farm-house for water," Annie ordered.

When he returned with the two heavy pails, cross and splashed, she fished out a bug or two with an air of dissatisfaction, and told him to build the fire. Peter built the fire, and, at Annie's suggestion, held the coffee-pot to keep it steady. He burnt his hands, and swore softly under his breath, and Annie laughed. Mrs. Carter, having started preparations, suddenly recalled her duties as hostess and hurried off again, leaving Annie to superintend the remainder alone.

"Here, Peter," said Annie, "I want ye to open these cans o' sardines."

Peter looked after the retreating figure of Mrs. Carter. She was well out of hearing; he took from his pocket a cigarette and leisurely regarded it.

"I want these cans opened," Annie repeated more sharply.

Peter lighted his cigarette.

"I 'll tell Mrs. Carter if ye don't."

Peter threw himself down on the grass, and blowing a ring of smoke, looked dreamily off toward the ocean.

Mrs. Carter showed no signs of coming back, and Annie saw that her brief dominion was over. She picked up the can-opener and jabbed it viciously into the tin. It slipped and cut an ugly gash in her finger. She uttered a little cry of pain, and turned pale at sight of the blood, and Peter laughed. She turned her back to keep him from seeing the tears of anger that filled her eyes, and for the third time she solemnly swore never, never, *never* to speak to him again.

The two served the supper with the same grim silence behind the scenes that they exhibited before the guests. When it was over, instead of eating with Joe and Peter, Annie commenced gathering up the dishes and repacking them in the hampers ready for departure. The two men laughed and joked between

themselves, without taking any notice of her absence, and Annie angrily told herself that she would n't speak to Joe any more, either. Just as she had everything packed and was comforting herself with the thought that she would soon be back home, and the miserable day would be ended, Mrs. Carter reappeared.

"Your coffee was excellent, Annie," she said, pleasantly, "and you and Peter served very nicely indeed. And now, instead of going home, I should like to have you wait and make some lemonade to be served later in the evening. It will be a beautiful moonlight night, and you and Peter can stay and enjoy yourselves."

"Very well, ma'am," said Annie, dully.

Peter, at this news, lighted another cigarette and strolled off with Joe, while Annie, who was growing apathetic under a culmination of troubles, busied herself in making the lemonade, and then sat down by her baskets to wait. She could see through the gathering dusk the merry crowd upon the beach, as they scattered

about gathering driftwood for a fire. She heard every now and then, above the sound of the waves, a gay shout of laughter, and, nearer at hand, the restless stamping of the horses. She turned her back to the beach half pettishly, and sat watching Mr. Harry's sorrel as he nervously tossed his head and switched his tail, trying to keep off the sand flies. From that she fell to wondering how Mr. Harry happened to be there, and what Mr. Lane thought about it, and if there would be a fight. There probably would not, she reflected, with some regret, for gentlemen did not always fight when they should. (She had heard through the butcher's boy the story of Peter's prowess, and the knowledge had given some slight comfort.) Her reflections were suddenly interrupted by the sound of steps crashing toward her through the underbrush, and she looked up with a fast-beating heart. Her first thought was that it was Peter coming to make up, and she resolutely stiffened herself to withstand him,

but a second glance showed her that it was Mr. Lane.

"Where 's Joe?" he demanded.

"I don't know, Mr. Lane."

"Where 's Peter, then?"

"I don't know. The two o' them has n't been here since supper."

"Well, damn it! I 've got to find some one." Mr. Lane was evidently excited. "See here, Annie," he said, "you 're a good girl. Just give a message to Mrs. Carter from me, will you, please? Tell her a boy rode out on a bicycle with a telegram calling me back to New York immediately, and I had to ride back to the house without finding her in order to catch the ten-o'clock train. Don't say anything to Miss Ethel, and here 's something to buy a new dress. Good-bye."

"Thank you, sir. Good-bye."

He hastily rebuckled his horse's bridle, led him into the lane out of sight of the beach, and mounted and galloped off. Annie looked after

him with wide eyes; his bearing was not very jaunty; she wondered if Mr. Harry had whipped him. It did not seem likely, for Mr. Lane was the larger of the two; but for the matter of that, she reflected, so was the grocer's man larger than Peter. She did not understand it, but she slipped the bill into her pocket with a shrug of her shoulders. She could afford to be philosophic over other people's troubles.

It was growing dark in among the trees and she was beginning to feel very lonely. A big red moon was rising over the water, and a bright fire was crackling on the beach. The sound of singing was mingled with the beating of the surf. Annie wandered out from the shadow of the trees and strolled up the beach away from the camp-fire and the singers. Presently she dropped down in the shadow of a sand dune and sat with her chin in her hands pensively watching the black silhouettes against the fire. By and by she saw two figures strolling along

the beach in her direction. She recognized them as Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry, and she crouched down behind the dune until they passed. She felt lonelier than ever as she watched them disappear, and the first thing she knew, she had buried her head in her arms and was crying to herself — but not very hard, for she was mindful of the ride home, and she did not wish to make her eyes red. Not for the world would she have let Peter know that she felt unhappy.

Suddenly into the midst of her misery came the sound of scrunching sand and the smell of cigarette smoke. Then, without looking up, she felt that some one was standing over her and that that some one was Peter. She held her breath and waited like a little ostrich, with her head burrowed into the sand.

Peter it was, and a mighty struggle was going on within his breast, but love is stronger than pride, and his Irish heart conquered in the end.

He bent over and touched her shoulder lightly.

"Annie!" he whispered.

She held her breath and kept her face hidden.

He dropped on his knee in the sand beside her. "Annie, darlin', don't be cryin'. Tell me what 's the trouble." He forcibly transferred her head from the sand bank to his shoulder, and her tears trickled down his neck. "Is it yer finger that 's hurtin' ye?"

She raised a tear-stained face with a quick smile quivering through at this purely masculine suggestion.

"It 's not me finger; it 's me feelin's," she breathed into his ear. Peter tightened his arms around her. "But they 're not hurtin' any more," she added with a little laugh.

"An' this time we 'll be friends f'r always?"

She nodded.

"Gee!" he whispered. "I 've been spendin' the week in hell thinkin' ye did n't care nothin' for me."

"So uv I," said Annie.

As they sat watching the rippling path of moonlight on the water, from far down the beach they could hear the voices singing, "It 's the spring time of life and the world is all before us." Annie laughed happily as she listened.

"I was wishin' a while ago that I was Miss Ethel 'cause she has everything she wants, but I don't wish it any more. She has n't got you, Petey."

"And I 'm thinkin' she is n't wantin' me," said Peter, with his eyes on the beach above them, where Miss Ethel and Mr. Harry were coming toward them hand in hand. The two stopped suddenly as they caught sight of Annie and Peter and hastily dropped each others' hands. Then Miss Ethel ran forward with a conscious little laugh.

"Annie, you shall be the first to congratulate me — but it 's a secret; you must n't tell a soul."

Annie looked back with shining eyes. "I 'm engaged, too," she whispered.

"You dear!" said Miss Ethel, and she put her arm around her and kissed her.

Peter and Mr. Harry stood a moment eyeing each other awkwardly, then they reached out across the gulf that separated them and shook hands.

A PARABLE FOR HUSBANDS

X

A PARABLE FOR HUSBANDS

BLUE GIPSY'S filly had broken two pairs of shafts, kicked a hole through a dash-board, and endeavoured to take a fence carriage and all, in a fixed determination not to become a harness-horse. It was evident that she had chosen her career and meant to stick to it.

"Break her to the shafts if you have to half kill her," Mr. Harry had said, but there were some things that Mr. Harry did not understand so well as Peter.

"Where 's the use in spoilin' a good jumper for the sake o' makin' a poor drivin' horse?" Peter had asked the trainer, and he had added that the master was talking through his hat.

Peter had already explained the matter to

Mr. Harry, but Mr. Harry was very much like the filly; when he had made up his mind he did not like to change. Peter decided to talk it over once more, however, before he risked another groom. The first groom had dislocated his shoulder, and he refused to have any further intercourse with Blue Gypsy's filly.

Poor Peter felt himself growing old under the weight of his responsibilities. Three years before he had been a care-free groom at Willowbrook; now, since Miss Ethel had married Mr. Harry, he was coachman at Jasper Place, with seven horses and three men under him. Occasionally he gazed rather wistfully across the meadow to where the Willowbrook stables showed a red blur through the gray-green trees. He had served there eleven years as stable-boy and groom, and though he had more than once tasted the end of a strap under Joe's vigorous dominion, it had been a happily irresponsible life. Not that he wished the old

time back, for that would mean that there would be no Annie waiting supper for him at night in the coachman's cottage, but he did wish sometimes that Mr. Harry had a little more common sense about managing horses. Blue Gypsy's filly trotting peaceably between shafts! It was in her blood to jump, and jump she would; you might as well train a bull pup to grow up a Japanese poodle and sleep on a satin cushion.

Peter, pondering the matter, strolled over to the kitchen and inquired of Ellen where Mr. Harry was. Mr. Harry was in the library, she said, and Peter could go right through.

The carpet was soft, and he made no noise. He did not mean to listen, but he had almost reached the library door before he realized and then he stood still, partly because he was dazed, and partly because he was interested.

He did not know what had gone before, but the first thing he heard was Miss Ethel's voice, and though he could not see her, he knew from

the tone what she looked like, with her head thrown back and her chin up and her eyes flashing.

"I am the best judge of my own actions," she said, "and I shall receive whom I please. You always put the wrong interpretation on everything I do, and I am tired of your interfering. If you would go away and leave me alone it would be best for us both — I feel sometimes as though I never wanted to see you again."

Then a long silence, and finally the cold, repressed tones of her husband asked: "Do you mean that?"

She did not answer, except by a long indrawn sob of anger. Peter had heard that sound before, when she was a child, and he knew how it ought to be dealt with; but Mr. Harry did not; he was far too polite.

After another silence he said quietly: "If I go, I go to stay — a long time."

"Stay forever, if you like."

Peter turned and tiptoed out, feeling unhappy and ashamed, as he had felt that other time when he had overheard. He went back to the stables, and sitting down with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, he pondered the situation. If he were Mr. Harry for just ten minutes, he told himself fiercely, he would soon settle things; but Mr. Harry did not understand. When it came to managing horses he was too rough, as if they had no sense; and when it came to managing women, he was too easy, as if they were all sense. Peter sighed miserably. His heart ached for them both: for Miss Ethel, because he knew that she did not mean what she said, and would later be sorry; for Mr. Harry, because he knew that he did mean what he said — terribly and earnestly. Neither understood the other, and it was all such a muddle when just a little common sense would have made everything happy. Then he shrugged his shoulders and told himself that it was none of his business; that he guessed

they could make up their quarrels without help from him. And he fell to scolding the stable-boy for mixing up the harness.

In about half an hour, Oscar, the valet, came running out to the stables looking pleased and excited, with an order to get the runabout ready immediately to go to the station. Oscar was evidently bursting with news, but Peter pretended not to be interested, and kept on with his work without looking up.

"The master 's going in to New York and I follow to-night with his things, and to-morrow we sail for England! Maybe we 'll go from there on a hunting trip to India — I 'm to pack the guns. There 's been trouble," he added significantly. "Mrs. Jasper 's in her room with the door banged shut, and the master is pretty quiet and white-like about the gills."

"Shut up an' mind yer own business," Peter snapped, and he led out the horses and began putting on the harness with hands that trembled.

As he drew up at the stepping-stone, Mr.

Harry jumped in. "Well, Peter," he said, in a voice which was meant to be cheerful, but was a very poor imitation, "we must drive fast if we 're to make the four-thirty train."

"Yes, sir," said Peter, briskly clicking to the horses, and for once he thanked his stars that the station was four miles away. A great resolve had beeen growing in his mind, and it required some time and a good deal of courage to carry it out. He glanced sideways at the grim, pale face beside him, and cleared his throat uneasily.

"Beggin' yer pardon," he began, "I was at the library door to ask about the filly, an' without meanin' to, I heard why you was goin' away."

A quick flush spread over Mr. Harry's face, and he glanced angrily at his coachman.

"The devil!" he muttered.

"Yes, sir," said Peter. "I suppose ye 'll be dischargin' me, Mr. Harry, for speakin', but I feel it 's me dooty, and I can't keep quiet.

Beggin' yer pardon, sir, I 've knowed Miss Ethel longer than you have. I was servin' at Willowbrook all the time that ye was in boardin' school an' college. Her hair was hangin' down her back an' she was drivin' a pony cart when I first come. I watched her grow and I know her ways — there was times, sir, when she was most uncommon troublesome. She 's the kind of a woman as needs managin', and if ye 'll excuse me for sayin' so, it takes a man to do it. Ye 're too quiet an' gentleman-like, Mr. Harry. Though I guess she likes to have ye act like a gentleman, when ye can't do both she 'd rather have ye act like a man. If I was her husband ——"

"You forget yourself, Peter!"

"Yes, sir. Beg yer pardon, sir, but as I was sayin', if I was her husband, I 'd let her see who was master pretty quick, an' she 'd like me the better. And if she ever told me she would be glad for me to go away an' never come back, I 'd look at her black like with me

arms folded, and I 'd say: "Ye would, would ye? In that case I 'll stay right here an' niver go away.' An' then she 'd be so mad she 'd put her head down on the back o' the chair an' cry, deep like, the way she always did when she could n't have what she wanted, an' I 'd wait with a frown on me brow, an' when she got through she 'd be all over it, an' would ask me pardon sorrowful like; an' I 'd wait a while an' let it soak in, an' then I 'd forgive her."

Mr. Harry stared at Peter, too amazed to speak.

"Yes, sir," Peter resumed, "I 've watched Miss Ethel grow up, and I knows her like her own mother, as ye might say. I 've drove her to and from the town for thirteen years, and I 've rode after her many miles on horseback, an' when she felt like it she would talk to me as chatty as if I were n't a groom. She was always that way with the servants; she took an interest in our troubles, an' we all

liked her spite o' the fact that she was a bit over-rulin'."

Mr. Harry knit his brows and stared ahead without speaking, and Peter glanced at him uneasily and hesitated.

"There 's another thing I 'd like to tell ye, sir, though I 'm not sure how ye 'll take it."

"Don't hesitate on my account," murmured Mr. Harry, ironically. "Say anything you please, Peter."

"Well, sir, I guess ye may have forgotten, but I was the groom ye took with ye that time before ye was married when ye an' Miss Ethel went to see the old wreck."

Mr. Harry looked at Peter with a quick, haughty stare; but Peter was examining the end of his whip and did not see.

"An' ye left me an' the cart, sir, under the bank, if ye 'll remember, an' ye did n't walk far enough away, an' ye spoke pretty loud, and I could n't help hearin' ye."

"Damn your impertinence!" said Mr. Harry.

"Yes, sir," said Peter. "I never told no one, not even me wife, but I understood after that how things was goin'. An' when ye went away travellin' so sudden, I s'picioned ye was n't feelin' very merry over the trip; an' I watched Miss Ethel, and I was sure she was n't feelin' merry, for all she tried mighty hard to make people think she was. When they was lookin', sir, she laughed an' flirted most outrageous with them young men as used to be visitin' at Willowbrook, but I knew, sir, that she did n't care a snap of her finger for any o' them, for in between times she used to take long rides on the beach, with me followin' at a distance — at a very respectful distance; she was n't noticin' my troubles then, she had too many of her own. When there were n't no one on the beach she 'd leave me the horses an' walk off by herself, an' sit on a sand dune, an' put her chin in her hand an' stare at the water till the horses was that crazy with the sand flies I could scarcely hold 'em. An' sometimes

she 'd put her head down an' cry soft like, fit to break a man's heart, and I 'd walk the horses off, with me hands just itchin' — beggin' yer pardon, sir, to get a holt o' you, for I knew that ye was the cause."

"You know a great deal too much," said Mr. Harry, dryly.

"A groom learns considerable without meanin' to, and it 's lucky his masters is if he knows how to keep his mouth shut. As I was sayin', Mr. Harry, I knew all the time she was longin' for ye, but was too proud to let ye know. If ye 'll allow the impertinence, sir, ye made a mistake in the way ye took her at her word. She loved ye too much not to be willin' to forgive ye for everything; and if ye 'd only understood her an' handled her right, she would n't 'a' throwed ye over."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if ye 'll excuse me speakin' allegorical like, as she 's the kind of a woman as needs a sharp bit and a steady hand on the

bridle, an' when she bolts a touch o' the lash — not too much, for she would n't stand it, but enough to let her see who 's master. I 've known some women an' many horses, sir, an' I 've noticed as the blooded ones is alike in both. If ye 'll excuse me mentionin' it, Miss Ethel was badly broke, sir. She was given the rein when she needed the whip, but for all that, she 's a thoroughbred, sir, an' that 's the main thing."

Peter imperceptibly slowed his horses.

"If ye don't mind, Mr. Harry, I 'd like to tell ye a little story. It happened six or seven years ago when ye was away at college, and if Miss Ethel is a bit unreasonable now, she was more unreasonable then. It was when the old master first bought Blue Gypsy — as was a devil if there ever was one. One afternoon Miss Ethel takes it into her head she wants to try the new mare, so she orders her out, with me to follow. What does she do but make straight for the beach, sir, an' gallop along

on the hard sand close to the water-line. It was an awful windy day late in October, with the clouds hangin' low an' the waves dashin' high, and everything sort o' empty an' lonesome. Blue Gypsy was n't used to the water, an' she was so scared she was 'most crazy, rearin' an' plungin' till ye would a swore she had a dozen legs — not much of a horse for a lady, but Miss Ethel could ride all right. She kept Blue Gypsy's head to the wind an' galloped four or five miles up the beach, with me poundin' along behind, hangin' on to me hat for dear life.

" 'T was ebb-tide, but time for the flood, and I was beginning to think we 'd better go back, unless we wanted to plough through the loose shingle high up, which is mighty hard on a horse, sir. But when we come to the Neck, Miss Ethel rode straight on; I did n't like the looks of it much, but I did n't say nothin' for the Neck 's never under water an' there were n't no danger. But what does she do when we comes to the end o' the Neck, but

turn to ride across the inlet to the mainland, which ye can do easy enough at low tide, but never at high. The sand was already gettin' oozy, an' with the wind blowin' off the sea the tide was risin' fast. Ye know what it would 'a' meant, sir, if she 'd gone out an' got caught. An' what with that unknown devil of a Blue Gypsy she was ridin', there was no tellin' when it would happen.

" 'Miss Ethel,' I calls, sort o' commandin' like, for I was too excited for politeness, 'ye can't go across.'

"She turns around an' stares at me haughty, an' goes on.

"I gallops up an' says: 'The tide's a risin', Miss Ethel, an' the inlet is n't safe.'

"She looks me over cool an' says: 'It is perfectly safe. I am goin' to ride across; if you are afraid, Peter, you may go home.'

"With that she whips up an' starts off. I was after her in a minute, gallopin' up beside her, an' before she knew what I was doin' I

reaches out me hand an' grabs hold o' the bridle an' turns Blue Gypsy's head. I did n't like to do it, for it seemed awful familiar, but with people as contrary as they is, sir, ye 've got to be familiar sometimes, if ye 're goin' to do any good in the world.

"Well, Mr. Harry, as ye can believe, she did n't like it, an' she calls out sharp and imperative for me to let go. But I hangs on an' begins to gallop, an' with that she raises her crop an' cuts me over the hand as hard as she can. It hurt considerable, but I held on an' did n't say nothin', an' she raised her arm to strike again. But just at that moment a wave broke almost at the horses' feet, an' Blue Gypsy reared, an' Miss Ethel, who was n't expectin' it, almost lost her balance an' the crop dropped on the sand.

" 'Peter,' she says, 'go back an' get me that crop."

"But by that time I 'd got the bit in me teeth, sir, an' I just laughs — ugly like — an' keeps

holt o' the bridle an' gallops on. Well, sir, then she was 'most crazy, an' she tries to shake off me arm with her fist, but she might as well have tried to shake down a tree. I looks at her, an' smiles to meself impertinent, an' keeps on. An' she looks all around, desperate like, hopin' to see someone within call, but the beach was empty, an' there was n't nothin' she could do, I bein' so much stronger."

"You brute!" said Mr. Harry.

"I was savin' her life," said Peter. "An' when she saw she could n't do nothin' she kind o' sobbed down low to herself an' said, soft like: '*I 'll discharge you, Peter, when we get home.*'

"I touches me hat an' says as polite as ye please: 'Very well, miss, but we ain't home yet, miss, and I 'm boss for the present.'

"With that a great big wave comes swash up against the horses' legs, an' lucky it is that I had a holt o' the bridle, for Blue Gypsy would 'a' thrown her sure. An' after I got her back on her four legs — Blue Gypsy, sir — an'

we was goin' on again, Miss Ethel throws a look over her shoulder at the inlet which was all under water, an' then she looks down at me hand that had a great big red welt across it, an' she said so low I could scarce hear her over the waves:

" 'You can take your hand away, Peter. I 'll ride straight home.'

"I knew she meant it, but me hand was burnin' like fire, and I 'd got me temper up, so I looks at her doubtin' like, as if I could n't believe her, an' she turns red an' says, 'Can't ye trust me, Peter?' an' with that I touches me hat an' falls behind.

"An' when we got back, sir, and I got off at the porter-ker-cher to help her dismount, what does she do but take me big red hand in both o' hers, an' she looks at the scar, an' then she looks in me eyes, an' she says, like as ye hit straight from the shoulder, sir, 'Peter,' she says, 'I 'm sorry I struck you. Will ye forgive me?' she says.

"An' I touches me hat an' says: 'Certainly, miss. Don't mention it, miss,' an' we was friends after that.

"An' that 's the reason, Mr. Harry, I hate to see ye go off an' — beggin' yer pardon — make a fool o' yerself. For she loves ye true, sir, like as Annie loves me, an' I know, sir, if she took it hard before ye was married, it ud near kill her now. Ye must n't mind what she says when she 's angry, for she just thinks o' the worst things she can to hurt yer feelin's, but Lord! sir, she don't mean it no more 'n a rabbit, an' if ye 'll give her half a chance and don't act like an iceberg she 'll want to make up. Me an' Annie, Mr. Harry, we pulls together lovely. I 'm the boss in some things, an' she 's the boss in others; I lets her think she can manage me, an' she lets me think I can manage her — and I can, sir. Sometimes we have little quarrels, but it 's mostly for the joy o' makin' up, an' we 're that happy, sir, that we wants to see everyone else happy."

The horses had slowed to a walk, but Mr. Harry did not notice it. A smile was beginning to struggle with the hard lines about his mouth.

"Well, Peter," he said, "you 've preached quite a sermon. What would you advise?"

"That ye go back an' take a firm hold o' the bridle, sir, an' if she uses the whip, just hold on hard an' don't let on that it hurts."

Mr. Harry looked at Peter and the smile spread to his eyes. "And then when she drops it," he asked, "just laugh and ride on?"

Peter coughed a deprecatory cough.

"Beggin' yer pardon, Mr. Harry, I think if I was in your place I 'd pick it up an' keep it meself. It might come in handy in case of emergencies."

Mr. Harry threw back his head in a quick, boyish laugh, and reaching over he took the lines and turned the horses' heads.

"Peter," he said, "you may be elemental, but I half suspect you 're right."

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